



**TERROR** ON THE  
**TELEVISION**  
THE QUATERMASS  
EXPERIMENT AT 70

THE LAST LANTERN SHOW KENNETH ANGER REMEMBERED  
VERY DEEP DIVES TITANIC CONSPIRACY THEORIES  
SPILLING THE BEANS UFO WHISTLEBLOWERS

THE  
WORLD'S  
WEIRDEST  
NEWS

CAMEL CARNAGE • POSSESSED SEX DOLL • SATAN IN SUFFOLK • HUMAN SEAGULLS

THE WORLD OF STRANGE PHENOMENA

WWW.FORTEANTIMES.COM

# ForteanTimes

FT434 AUGUST 2023 £4.95

## YOU ONLY LIVE TWICE...

PAST LIFE REGRESSION,  
REINCARNATION AND  
THE QUEST FOR LOST  
MEMORIES

### LOST BOYS AND GIRLS

HAUNTING TALES OF  
GHOSTLY CHILDREN

### TWILIGHT OF THE GODLINGS

THE ORIGINS OF BRITAIN'S  
SUPERNATURAL BEINGS



9 770308 589262



# FROM THE SAME AUTHOR OF 'OUT OF HAND IN A FOREIGN LAND' WHICH YOU ALSO DIDN'T READ...

"Avoiding carnivores in the Kenyan countryside, getting mugged in Brazil, entering a country at war for a single pint of beer, meeting the gangsters of a Ugandan botanical garden, or simply struggling to urinate in front of Peruvian drug dealers. It all comes with getting off the tourist trail and away from the usual holiday resorts.

Stephen Koral has a dream to travel to a hundred countries before he kicks the bucket. Now in his mid-thirties while juggling adult matters like finances and keeping his fiery wife happy, Koral finds the easy to travel countries are in the rear-view mirror, and the new destinations have become increasingly harder for a British traveller to adapt to in the relentless pursuit of seeing more of the world"

**NEW  
BOOK**  
BY STEPHEN  
KORAL



**"Good  
and that"**

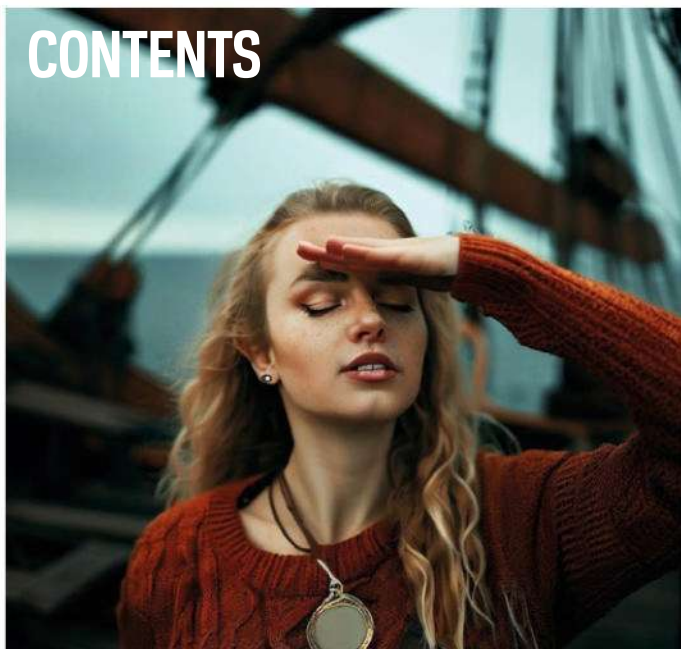


Amazon review

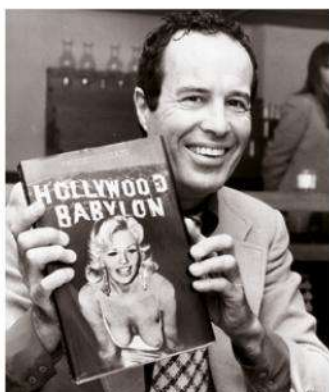
Available at [amazon](https://www.amazon.com) as a paperback or ebook



# CONTENTS



30 In search of past lives



26 Farewell Kenneth Anger



38 Fairies and godlings



68 Chimp Napoleon



22 Epic pet treks



52 The Quatermass Experiment at 70



## FORTEAN TIMES 434

### Why fortean?

Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!

SEE PAGE  
**70**

## STRANGE DAYS

A digest of the worldwide weird, including: Colombian survival miracle, child ghosts, pet treks, resurrections and much more...

- |                       |                      |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 11 CLASSICAL CORNER   | 16 GHOSTWATCH        |
| 12 ARCHÆOLOGY         | 20 STRANGE CONTINENT |
| 14 SCIENCE            | 25 MYTHCONCEPTIONS   |
| 15 THE CONSPIRASPHERE | 28 THE UFO FILES     |

## FEATURES



### 30 COVER STORY IN SEARCH OF PAST LIVES

All sorts of people, from mystics to military leaders, believe they have lived previous lives, while therapists and hypnotists offer the chance to relive memories of these existences. **SIMON YOUNG** offers a sceptic's experience of past life regressions while **PAUL GODDARD** provides a practitioner's perspective.

### 38 FAIRY ORIGINS

Pagan survivals? Folk memories? Degenerated gods? Where did Britain's fairies come from? And what part did Roman occupiers, Christian missionaries and mediæval romancers play in their creation? **FRANCIS YOUNG** untangles the complex history and murky origins of Britain's supernatural beings.

### 42 REVISITING ARTHUR C CLARKE'S WORLD OF STRANGE POWERS PART 3

In 1985, Arthur C Clarke was back with a sequel to *Mysterious World*, focusing on strange phenomena's human element. **RYAN SHIRLOW** concludes his reassessment of a fortean TV classic.

## SERIES & REPORTS

### 68 PECULIAR POSTCARDS

The Napoleon of the chimpanzee world **JAN BONDESON**

## FORUM

51 Celebrity grave-spotting **TED HARRISON**

52 The Quatermass Experiment at 70 **JON DEAR**

## REGULARS

- |              |                |                   |
|--------------|----------------|-------------------|
| 02 EDITORIAL | 63 LETTERS     | 71 PHENOMENOMIX   |
| 55 REVIEWS   | 70 READER INFO | 72 STRANGE DEATHS |

## EDITOR

DAVID SUTTON

drsutton@forteantimes.com

## FOUNDING EDITORS

BOB RICKARD (ft-bobrickard@mail.com)

PAUL SIEVEKING (sieveking@forteantimes.com)

## NEWS EDITOR

IAN SIMMONS (simmons@forteantimes.com)

## ART DIRECTOR

ETIENNE GILFILLAN (etienne@forteantimes.com)

## BOOK REVIEWS EDITOR

DAVID V BARRETT (dvbarrett@forteantimes.com)

## EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

ABIGAIL MASON

## RESIDENT CARTOONIST

HUNT EMERSON

## PRODUCTION MANAGER

LEE BOYMAN (lee.boyman@metropolis.co.uk)

## ADVERTISING

BEN LORTON (ben.lorton@metropolis.co.uk)

## FT ON THE INTERNET

www.forteantimes.com

www.facebook.com/forteantimes

FORTEAN TIMES is produced for Diamond Publishing Limited, a member of the Metropolis Group, by WILD TALENTS LTD. Postal address: Fortean Times, PO BOX 1200, Whitstable CT11 9RH.

## SUBSCRIPTIONS

STANDARD SUBSCRIPTION RATES

12 issues: UK £50.58; Europe £62; USA £70;

Rest of the world £70

## CHANGE YOUR ADDRESS, RENEW YOUR SUBSCRIPTION OR REPORT PROBLEMS:

hello@metropolis.co.uk / +44 (0) 208 752 8195

## LICENSING & SYNDICATION

FORTEAN TIMES is available for international licensing and Syndication  
Managing Director

David Saunders TEL: +44 (0) 208 752 8195

david.saunders@metropolis.co.uk

## DISTRIBUTION

### DISTRIBUTED IN UK, IRELAND AND WORLDWIDE

by Marketforce (UK) Ltd, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU.

Email: mfccommunications@futurenet.com

Speciality store distribution by **Worldwide Magazine**

Distribution Ltd, Tel: 0121 788 3112 Fax: 0121 78

12720121 788 3112 Fax: 0121 78 1272

**diamondpublishing**

PUBLISHED BY DIAMOND PUBLISHING LIMITED.  
A MEMBER OF THE METROPOLIS GROUP.

Fortean Times (ISSN 0308-5899 USPS 023-728) is published 13 times a year with the additional issue (Christmas Special) published in November by Diamond Publishing Limited, 2nd Floor, Saunders House, 52-53 The Mall, Ealing, W5 3AT, United Kingdom. Airfreight and mailing in the USA by World Container Inc., c/o BBT 150-15 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413-4037, USA. Periodicals Postage Paid at Brooklyn, NY 11256. **US POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to Fortean Times, World Container Inc., c/o BBT 150-15 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413-4037, USA.

© Diamond Publishing Limited: JUNE 2023



COVER ILLUSTRATION

ETIENNE GILFILLAN

THANKS TO COVER MODEL  
JONATHAN ROSS AT  
GALLERY 286 IN EARL'S  
COURT

WWW.INSTAGRAM.COM/  
JROSS286/

PRINTED BY PRECISION  
COLOUR PRINTING

# EDITORIAL



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS



## HAVE WE LIVED BEFORE?

With this issue we come to the end of our survey of *Arthur C Clarke's World of Strange Powers* with the last instalment in Ryan Shirlow's epic rewatch of the whole series taking in such fortean favourites as communications from the other side, curses and maledictions and the metal-bending antics of Uri Geller. Previously (FT433:44-45), Clarke had considered the evidence for cases of reincarnation and some people's belief that they had experienced past lives. It's a topic we return to in this issue's cover story, in which regular FT columnist Simon Young undergoes a number of past life regressions and subjects the results – which are sometimes powerful and surprising – to a sceptical analysis. Meanwhile, hypnotherapist Paul Goddard, who has been performing past life regressions for over a decade, shares his experiences of the controversial practice and offers a different perspective. Whether or not you agree with much of the medical establishment that we're dealing with cryptomnesia and confabulation rather than genuine glimpses of previous existences, we hope the two articles will lead to plenty of discussion in the letters pages.

## DID IT HAPPEN TO YOU?

Every now and then we find the cupboards at Fortean Towers bare of some essential commodity, and we are currently experiencing a shortage of first-hand accounts of strange experiences and fortean phenomena. We know that the 'It Happened to Me' section is many people's favourite bit of the magazine, because you often write, email or tweet to tell us so – and, yes, before you ask,

we do hope to restart the hugely popular IHTM book series one of these days – but there's not much we can do if you don't send in your stories to share with us.

So, we're appealing to all of you to ransack your memories and find the time to write up and send in your unusual, unnerving or even just plain odd experiences. While you're at it, why not interrogate your families, and ask your friends for their tales of the unexpected too? We would be extremely happy to receive and to reproduce all of these in the pages of FT. Anonymity is fine, but do let us have your name and address for our files: all we ask is that your IHTM entries are recollections of genuine experiences.

## ERRATA

**FT431:27:** The last line of this issue's Mythconceptions contained a typo and should have read: "If you fake a smile when you're down, doing so will in fact deepen your unhappiness" (not "happiness"). Thanks to Patrick Sheehy of Blackheath who was sufficiently shocked that "the usually reliable Mat Coward" had slipped up that he alerted us by email.

**FT431:56:** Phil Baker's review of the book *England On Fire* was only marred, in Matt Stanhope's words, "by his bold assertion that one of the authors, Mat Osman, is 'better known as the lead singer of Suede.' Mat Osman is, in fact, the band's longstanding bassist and, as Penelope Rafter pointed out, "the lead singer of Suede is the redoubtable Brett Anderson." Malcolm Henderson also spotted the error, and added a bit of trivia for us: Mat Osman is the brother of Richard "Pointless" Osman.



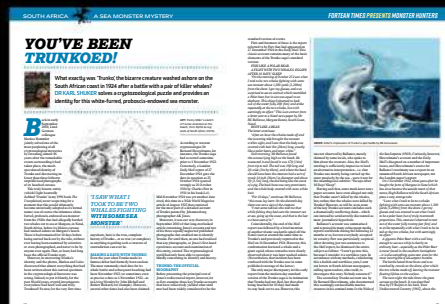


# TIME TO TOP UP THE MONSTER METER?



From the archives of **FORTEAN TIMES**, the world's foremost journal of strange phenomena, comes a new collection exploring the world of cryptozoology – the search for unknown animals.

Join us on expeditions to far-flung Mongolia to find the dreaded **DEATH WORM** of the Gobi Desert, to the Congo in search of a **LIVING DINOSAUR** and to Tajikistan on the trail of **TERRIFYING APE-MEN**. Explore the wilds of the USA on the track of **BIGFOOT** and the South Carolina **LIZARD MAN**, or venture to the marshes of Sweden to investigate sightings of **GIANT SERPENTS**. And sign up for closer-to-home hunts for **NESSIE** and **BRITAIN'S MYSTERY BIG CATS**, including the infamous 'Essex Lion'. **MONSTER HUNTERS** takes readers on an exciting round-the-world quest to track the most amazing, elusive and sometimes unbelievable crypto-creatures. Plus, the collection includes an introduction and updates and commentary on each article by renowned cryptozoologist **DR KARL SHUKER**.



**IN SHOPS NOW OR ORDER ONLINE AT: [SHOP.FORTEANTIMES.COM](http://SHOP.FORTEANTIMES.COM)**





A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

# STRANGE DAYS

## COLOMBIAN SURVIVAL MIRACLE



PHOTOS: COLOMBIAN MILITARY FORCES

In the early hours of 1 May, the pilot of a Cessna 206 aircraft flying from the village of Araracuara to San Jose del Guaviare in Colombia's Guaviare province made an emergency Mayday call, saying the plane had suffered engine failure, before ditching in the country's thick Amazonian rainforest. The small plane was carrying a mother and her four children, plus another adult and the pilot, but, given the remote area in which it crashed, the authorities did not hold out much hope for survivors. It took until 16 May for military search parties to find the crash site and when they got there, they found the bodies of the three adults but not those of the children. This led the office of Colombian president Gustavo Petro to issue

### *The search involved special forces troops and indigenous scouts*



an announcement on Twitter saying: "After arduous searching by our military, we have found alive the four children who went missing after a plane crash in Guaviare. A joy for the country". However, this was not the case; while there was evidence they had survived, the search teams had not actually found the children. Once this was realised, the President withdrew his tweet and a major search began to locate the missing children, Lesly Mukutuy, 13, and her siblings Soleiny, nine, Tien, four, and Christin, one, members of the Huitoto indigenous community.

The search for the survivors involved more than 100 Colombian special forces troops and over 70 indigenous scouts combing the forest for weeks,

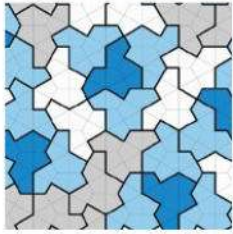
LEFT: A photo released by the Colombian military shows soldiers and indigenous people along with the children rescued after 40 days in the jungle, in Guaviare, Colombia.

encouraged to keep searching by finds of footprints, a nappy, a baby bottle, and fruit with human bite marks. Helicopters dropped boxes of food into the forest in the hope that the children would find them, and search teams used speakers to broadcast a message from the children's grandmother telling them to stay in one place so that they could be found.

In the end it took rescuers 40 days to find the children using sniffer dogs, although they were finally located when rescuers heard a cry from Cristin. The children were in a clearing three miles (5km) from the crash, and while they were dehydrated, emaciated and suffering from insect bites, all were alive. General Pedro Sánchez, who was in charge of the rescue said: "The minor children were already very weak, they were only strong enough to breathe or reach a small fruit to feed themselves or drink a drop of water in the jungle." The children were all taken to hospital in Colombia's capital, Bogota, where they were expected to remain for two weeks to recover from their ordeal.

The children's grandfather, Fidencio Valencia, told reporters that the eldest, Lesly and Soleiny, were well acquainted with the jungle as the Huitoto people learn hunting, fishing, and other survival skills from an early age, while their cousin Damarys Mucuty said that Lesly "knew what fruits she





## ONE MAN'S HAT TRICK

The tile shape  
that never  
repeats

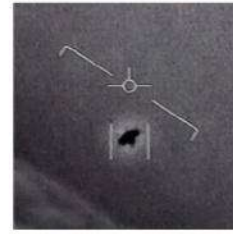
PAGE 10



## RED-EYED MONSTER

Polish city's  
streetlamp of  
horror

PAGE 21



## FULL DISCLOSURE?

Blowing the  
whistle on  
America's UFOs

PAGE 28



COLOMBIAN AIRFORCE

ABOVE: Colombian Air Force personnel give medical attention to one of the surviving children onboard a plane to Bogota. BELOW: Sniffer dogs played a big part in the search, especially the elusive Wilson, who spent time with the missing children.

can't eat because there are many poisonous fruits in the forest. And she knew how to take care of a baby." Initially the children had survived by eating cassava flour that they salvaged from the plane wreckage, but after this ran out Lesly used her knowledge to keep everyone alive, including building them temporary shelters from branches held together with her hair ties. The children ate fruits and seeds and drank water from streams; they were lucky, said Astrid Cáceres, the head of the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare, because "the jungle was in harvest", providing plenty of fruit. Sánchez said that his rescue teams had passed as close as 20 to 50 metres (66 to 165ft) to the children during the search but had not detected them. A relative said this was probably because the children were frightened of the uniformed search parties, as



their father had previously been threatened by members of a paramilitary rebel group. They had also apparently been scared by the message broadcast by the loudspeakers. "They heard the message and they were afraid – they hid in the bush so as not to be found," said journalist Alicia Méndez. "Every time [the search team] was close, they hid.

We don't know what was going through their little heads."

One of the rescue dogs, named Wilson, who went missing during the search, was key to finding the children. He had not only turned up the baby bottle, but, after disappearing, had spent some time with the children. It was by following Wilson's footprints that searchers were led to the children's location, although by then Wilson had moved on and soldiers were continuing to search for him in the forest.

President Petro said that the children were an example of "total survival that will be remembered in history", adding that "the jungle saved them, they are children of the jungle, and now they are also children of Colombia". *huffpost.com*, 18 May; *BBC News*, 10 June; *editionscnn.com*, 11 June; *theguardian.com*, 11+12 June 2023.

## EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES  
FROM AROUND THE WORLD

### AQUAMAN RESIGNS FROM COMMITTEE FOR BUILDING GIANT COLOSSAL BOB DYLAN STATUES

Flipboard (Duluth, MN), 28 Mar 2023.

### 'Penguin' spotted on Dover promenade stuns residents

Kent Online, 18 Jan 2023

### COPS: S.C. WOMAN STABBED SPOUSE WITH CERAMIC SQUIRREL OVER BEER

CBC News, 30 Dec 2013.

### Father bludgeons sex offender to death with moose antler

D.Telegraph, 12 Mar 2023.

### FATHER KILLED BY 'VIOLENT CHICKEN': MAN DIED WITH 'MASSIVE BLEEDING' WHILE WHISPERING 'ROOSTER' ...

dailymail.co.uk, 16 Feb 2023





## SIDELINES

### HOMESICK SNAKE

After a highly venomous King Cobra, named "Sir Hiss", escaped from his tank during maintenance at the Skansen leisure complex in Stockholm, staff attempted to capture him with glue traps and tempt him out with dead rats, then tried to track his movements by putting flour on the floor and cameras in the wall cavities, all to no avail. Eventually borrowed X-ray scanners located him in the ceiling, but when staff tried to cut into the space using angle grinders, he gave them the slip again, eventually turning up back in his original tank. *Times*, 31 Oct 2022.

### FLORIDA MAN

Police in Pennsylvania tried to pull over Tony Jay Saunders Jr, of Port Lucie, Florida, who was spotted driving a stolen school bus. After initially complying, Saunders drove away again, weaving through busy traffic until he finally crashed the bus, in which police found a dead deer. He then fled on foot into nearby woods, shedding his clothes as he went, eventually being "apprehended in the nude". Saunders admitted taking the bus after crashing a BMW earlier in the day and said he'd stolen it to take the dead deer home so he could use the remains to "fertilise his garden". *boston25news.com*, 4 Apr 2023.

### HUMAN SEAGULLS

Blackpool Zoo claim to be recruiting staff to act as "human seagull deterrents" to drive dive-bombing seagulls away from their outdoor eating areas. They say that the successful candidates will need to wear an inflatable seagull costume and be "outgoing and energetic". This drastic step is apparently necessary because "the zoo has put up 'dummy' falcons/hawks on the roof of the establishment but this is not working", or possibly because it is great publicity at the start of the visitor season. *mirror.co.uk*, 24 Apr 2023.



MARTIN ROSS

## SEASON OF THE WITCH

Skinwalkers, Satanists and a super-nun...



KENNEDY NEWS & MEDIA

### TRAIL CAMERA MYSTERY

Having found a dead deer at the bottom of her garden in Powell River, Canada, Corinea Stanhope, 36, rigged up a trail camera trained on the carcass to record any wildlife it might attract overnight. Reviewing the recorded footage the next day, Stanhope and her grandfather, Bob, 76, spotted a bobcat visiting the remains, but also something more unusual.

"Grandpa said he'd got naked people on the camera, and I said 'No, no you didn't. Bullshit!' So he showed me," said Stanhope. Ten minutes after sunset, two half-naked women, one wearing just a loincloth, the other ragged trousers, with long, matted black hair covering their faces come into shot. They squat down next to the carcass and probe it with their fingers before one picks up a leg and appears to bite or suck on the hoof. "I don't know if she was kissing it, smelling it or eating it, but to touch a decaying carcass like that makes me feel sick. The amount of bacteria that must have been on there," said Stanhope. "It really creeped me out because it's only a two-minute walk from our house and I was concerned about them messing with my horses at night."



*They squat down next to the carcass and probe it with their fingers*

After sharing images from the recording on social media, Stanhope got a lot of responses from viewers convinced she'd captured images of witches, demons or evil spirits, with some even suggesting the women were Wendigo or Skinwalkers. She said: "There's rumours around town about a cult that collects animal bones. I don't know if it's real or not. A friend said they came across two people in the woods

ABOVE: A disturbing image from Corinea Stanhope's trail camera. LEFT: The 'possessed' Thai sex doll.

carrying some dead squirrels." Stanhope considered calling the police, but her grandfather pointed out that the women weren't doing anything illegal. She hopes it is just someone playing a prank, saying: "It looks like they have wigs on. One looks like she has blonde hair underneath... I'm hoping they went for a walk in the day, saw the trail cam was set up and wanted to have a bit of fun with us... or they're on some good drugs." *the-sun.com*, 3 Jun 2023.

### DOLL TROUBLE

An unnamed Thai "sex doll collector" – he says he does not use them for sexual purposes, but studies the dolls' posture and anatomy for drawing, an activity that helped him get over depression – took to Facebook to investigate the background to one of his dolls. He says he bought a "flawless second-hand sex doll at a very reasonable price" from a stranger who messaged him via Facebook. After it was delivered the next day, he dressed it, combed its hair, and put it in the bedroom with the rest of his collection, but then he started to have unsettling experiences with the doll.





**ABOVE LEFT:** Pigs' hearts left on a marker stone at the Bronze Age burial site of Stagbury Hill in the New Forest. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The Suffolk town of Bungay is well known for its Black Shuck lore, but according to a recent survey is also a hotbed of Satanism.

Firstly, his girlfriend was severely disconcerted by how closely it resembled her; next, hearing a sound from the bedroom, he checked and found that a comb had fallen to the floor and the doll's previously tidy hair needed combing again. A few days later, he returned from a business trip to find the doll's head turned towards the door, when he'd left it facing straight ahead, after which he had a constant feeling of being watched when he was in the house.

He now believes that the doll is possessed by a spirit, which is why he got it cheap. The vendor knows nothing as he turns out to have been a middleman for an anonymous party, but the owner now believes trauma surrounds the doll and wants to know what happened. He is still keeping the doll though, it seems. *thethaiger.com*, 11 Apr 2023.

## WALL-CRAWLING NUN

Professional exorcist Reverend Daniel Reehil, who became a Catholic priest after a high-flying career in finance, recounted one of his most spectacular cases in an interview with YouTuber Michael Knowles.

"I remember there was a little nun, about 100lb [45kg], 5ft [1.5m]. When she was going through a deliverance, it took six large men, my size, to hold her down," Reehil said. "I've seen that same nun run up a 20ft [6m] wall like a squirrel, and 2,000 people at a conference saw it too... We had people flying from all over the world staying

with us [for deliverance]. Some for a week, [but] that one little nun who crawled the wall, she was there for over a year. It took a year." *dailystar.co.uk*, 28 Apr 2023.

## OCCULT CRIME WAVE

At the end of 2022, residents of the New Forest in Hampshire were described as being "unsettled" by a series of incidents that were believed by locals to have an occult purpose. St Peter's Church in Bramshaw was repeatedly targeted, with Reverend David Bacon saying: "A fox was found on the church doorstep a couple of weeks ago and then a cat was found hanging from the flagpole. I can't see that it's anything against the church as a local thing; as far as we know we don't have any enemies." In January, five pig hearts were left on a marker stone at the nearby Bronze Age burial site of Stagbury Hill, surrounded by a neat circle of 20 candles, resulting in police starting a hunt for "alleged Satanists". In May, a sheep was found with its throat slit and a local farmer said he had heard that at nearby Beaulieu a dead lamb had been found with a Bible placed on it. In January 2020 the area had also seen several sheep deaths, one of which involved a ewe being stabbed to death with a cross made of hay and left with a broken pitchfork placed next to it, while other dead sheep had pentagrams sprayed on them. In addition, another sheep and two cows were injured in attacks and St Peter's Church had "Satanic"

symbols painted on its door in 2019 (see FT389:4). Reverend Bacon said: "I have no idea why it is happening in our area. If it is connected to witchcraft, then the New Forest has been linked to witchcraft for hundreds of years." He added: "It's really unsettling and sinister for everyone. We're not sure what will happen next, if anything." The incidents do not remotely resemble any known rituals, Satanic or otherwise, and most seem to be vandalism with the "Satanic" elements derived from media scare stories. Following the incidents three years ago, police arrested a Winchester man on suspicion of six counts of criminal damage, but he was later released without charge, and they seem to have no leads as to who was responsible for the recent incidents.

*hampshirechronicle.co.uk*, 15 Dec 2022; *telegraph.co.uk*, 23 Jan, 28 May 2023.

## SATAN IN SUFFOLK

Analysis of 2021 census data has revealed that the small town of Bungay in Suffolk has the UK's greatest concentration of Satanists. The town, best known for an incident in 1577 when the Devil allegedly appeared in the church during a thunderstorm in the form of a black dog and attacked the congregation (see FT251:22-23, 424:14-17, 429:66-68), has 70 residents who declared themselves to be Satanists. As Bungay only has 8,500 residents, this means that one in every 120 people there are declared Satan worshippers. *timeout.com*, 2 Feb 2023.

## SIDELINES

### FISH FIGHT!

When Jobul Hussain, 60, was told by the fish counter assistant at his local grocery store in Warren, Detroit, that they were closing early due to Ramadan, he was not happy. After arguing with the assistant, he grabbed a 4lb (1.8kg) frozen hilsa fish, a relative of the herring, and beat the man about the head with it, earning himself an arrest for aggravated assault. "I never thought I'd have to say this, but if you assault someone with a fish in our county you will be prosecuted," said County Prosecutor Peter Lucido, adding: "A frozen fish is dangerous if you use it to hit someone on the head." *abcnews.go.com*, 3 Apr 2023.

### SEX WAR

Fanatical Russian patriot Mikhail Luchin, 34, raised £20,000 to buy drones for troops to use in the invasion of Ukraine. However, the pro-Ukraine Cyber Resistance Group meddled with his order so that AliExpress sent him £20,000 worth of sex toys instead. Finding himself stuck with vast quantities of vibrators, dildos and strap-ons, Luchin at first tried to return them, but finding that was impossible believes he will still have the last laugh, saying: "I will open a sex shop here [in Russia], make 300% profit and buy three times more drones." *metro.co.uk*, 5 Apr 2023.

### CIRCUS CLOWNS

Confused tourists have been leaving negative Tripadvisor reviews of Piccadilly Circus in central London after finding that it lacks performers, with one saying, "Not a circus, didn't see one juggler or clown," and another adding "Don't fall for the trip. It's a road junction." *D.Star*, 3 Feb 2023.

### PHANTOM FELLER

Police in Portland, Oregon, are on the track of an elusive lumberjack who has cut down more than 700 trees near a popular walking trail, using just a handsaw. Working only at night, the phantom tree feller has caused more than \$250,000 (£200,000) of damage and although a man has been caught on camera by the police, no one has been able to identify him. The feller's motives remain unclear; he isn't cutting down the trees for wood to use or sell as he leaves them where they fall. *Courier Mail (Queensland)*, 8 Oct 2022.





## SIDELINES...

### FOOTSICLE

Nurse Mary Brown, 38, of Durand, Wisconsin, was charged with elder abuse after amputating a hospice patient's frostbitten foot without consent. In court it was found that she had done so because she wanted the foot to display in her family's taxidermy shop with a sign reading "Wear your boots, kids". <i>12 Nov 2022.

### SCREAMING TREES

Actor Ahmed Ali Akbar caused a stir on social media by circulating a video shot on location near Islamabad, Pakistan, that appeared to show a tree crying for help. It showed a coin-sized hole in the tree from which could be heard sounds resembling human cries of distress. Some commenters believed it was paranormal in origin, while several took it as a sign that nature is in distress, although others pointed out that *National Geographic* had explained that water stressed trees form tiny bubbles in their trunks that burst and cause sounds that might seem like voices. *globalvillage-space.com*, 13 Dec 2022.

### KNOCKOUT WIN

19-year-old Delaney Irving, from Vancouver, Canada, won the women's cheese rolling race at Coopers Hill in Brockworth, near Gloucester, despite being unconscious at the time. Famously rough-and-tumble, the event involves chasing a 7lb (3kg) wheel of Gloucester cheese down a near-vertical slope and the 2023 race was the first for several years after Covid cancellations and safety concerns. Irving lost consciousness after striking her head on the way down, but her cheese made it to the bottom first. She only learned of her win when she revived in the medical tent, later saying the race was "good... now that I remember it". *theguardian.com*, 29 May 2023.



MARTIN ROSS

## RESURRECTION SHUFFLE | Death is not always the end...



ABOVE: Bella Montoya's family were shocked when the supposedly dead woman started knocking from within her coffin at her own wake. BELOW: Meanwhile, a woman was discovered walled up alive in a tomb in a cemetery in Brazil.

Retired nurse, Bella Montoya, 76, from Babahoyo, Ecuador, was rushed to hospital after suffering from a possible stroke and cardiac arrest, arriving at the emergency room unconscious. A few hours later doctors told her son Gilberto Barbera that she had not responded to resuscitation and had been declared dead, handing over her identity documents and a death certificate. The family then had her body taken to a funeral home and began to hold her wake. "There were about 20 of us there," Barbera said. "After about five hours of the wake, the coffin started to make sounds. My mom was wrapped in sheets and hitting the coffin, and when we approached we could see that she was breathing heavily." The family rushed Montoya back to the hospital where she was intubated and put in intensive care, although doctors told relatives that there was not much hope of her recovering, and, after surviving for a further week, she did eventually die, with the cause given as ischemic stroke. *theguardian.com*, 13 Jun; *abc.net.au*, 17 Jun 2023.

• Gravediggers in the Visconde do Rio Branco Municipal

*"After about five hours of the wake the coffin began to make sounds"*



Cemetery in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil, noticed fresh cement and blood near an old tomb and on investigating heard a voice from inside. Rescuers broke into the tomb and discovered a badly beaten 36-year-old woman inside; she had suffered head injuries and was in danger of needing a finger amputated. The woman had been attacked by three men who believed she had "misplaced" drugs and weapons she was storing for them at her home. They had beaten her unconscious,

dragged her to the tomb and walled her up inside, and she only realised she was trapped when she came round. Police immediately arrested two men, aged 20 and 22, who had previous convictions for weapons and drug trafficking, and were searching for the third, while the woman was making a good recovery in intensive care. *independent.co.uk*, 5 Apr 2023.

• Courtney Santiago, 32, was in hospital for a routine MRI scan, but when doctors put an intravenous line into her arm she suddenly went into shock, causing her blood pressure to drop vertiginously and her heart rate to slow drastically. Doctors later found she suffers from vasovagal syncope, a condition in which the body dramatically overreacts to certain stimuli, causing a slowing of the heart and a blood pressure plunge that briefly starves the brain of oxygen, resulting in a loss of consciousness; while it seems dramatic, it is not life threatening. Santiago, though, claims to have died for about 40 seconds during the attack, and says she came back with an important message from "the other side".

"There was no concept of





FAMILY PHOTO / ROSS TOWNSHIP POLICE DEPARTMENT



ABOVE: Patricia Kopta seen before her disappearance in 1992 and on her discovery as a dementia patient in 2022.

time whatsoever, just the feeling of complete peace," she said. "I wasn't worried about leaving behind my body, my life, my son or my family and friends – none of that felt important." In this "dream state" she says she found herself on a beach in front of a man she didn't recognise, but felt she had always known, and he told her that everything was OK, but it was not her time to go just yet. After this her surroundings morphed, first into a mountainscape, then into her childhood home and several other places where she felt close to nature, before she regained consciousness. "I'm 100 per cent certain what I saw was the 'in-between' and was much more than a fainting episode," Santiago said, and has gone on to make a series of TikToks to pass on the comforting message she feels she got from her experience. "When we die, we're not gone and where we go, we're happy... It's allowed me to become more open, improving my relationships with the people I love," she said. "I'm grateful that it happened and I feel like it serves as confirmation that our existence and consciousness do continue once we're gone – there is nothing to fear." *mirror.co.uk*, 27 May 2023.

- Patricia Kopta from Ross Township, Pittsburgh was a "well-known street preacher," in the early 1990s, frequently approaching strangers to tell them she had visions of the Virgin Mary, and that the world was coming to an end, but was last seen in the summer of 1992. Her husband Bob Kopta said that it wasn't uncommon for

his wife to "drop out of sight for short periods", but after a few weeks he reported her to police as a missing person. Despite intensive searching by her family, she could not be found, so they assumed she must be dead. However, 30 years later a dementia patient in a care home in Puerto Rico was identified as Patricia. "They reported to us that she came into their care in 1999, when she was found in need in the streets of Puerto Rico," Ross Township Deputy Chief Brian Kohlhepp said. The care home said that the woman had "refused to ever discuss her private life or where she came from", but as she got older had started to reveal clues that helped the home track her family down. Her husband said Patricia had talked of moving to Puerto Rico, although she had no connections there. "I even advertised in the paper down in Puerto Rico looking for her," he said. DNA testing confirmed Patricia's identity and her sister Gloria Smith said: "We really thought she was dead all those years; we didn't expect it. It was a very big shock to see – to know that she's still alive." She had tried to speak to Patricia on the phone several times but found her unable to hold a conversation due to her dementia. *edition.cnn.com*, 5 Mar 2023.

- In 2014 elderly Zhuo Kangluo fled his care home in China. Shortly afterwards, a victim of a road accident that looked like him was found nearby. Kangluo's family identified the corpse as his and had it cremated after his nephew said they did not

want an autopsy. Nine years later, authorities in Chongqing received reports of a man acting strangely in the city, whom they struggled to identify because he refused to answer their questions; however, on carrying out a DNA test they found a close match in Zhuo Kangluo's brother. Kangluo's grandson also apparently recognised the man as Zhuo on a poster distributed to try to identify the accident victim. When Kangluo's grandson visited, the man reportedly burst into tears and could also correctly spell the names of those related to him. As a result, Kangluo has been reunited with his family, while efforts are now under way to identify the man who was cremated under his name in 2014. *daailymail.co.uk*, 27 Feb 2023.

- A month after the death of his wife Ann, Stuart Dobson, 77, received a letter from South Norfolk Council saying that it was "sorry to hear" he had died and informing him he could get a council tax exemption as a result. Dobson wrote a letter to the council to complain, calling officials "ill-informed", which he delivered in person. "I've hand-delivered it to the council, asking them, 'Do I look dead to you?'" he said. "It's an utter shambles – they're asking me to fill in forms when they think I'm dead. It doesn't make sense. I don't need this at all." The council responded, saying, "We have reviewed what happened and unfortunately this was a case of human error for which we are deeply sorry." *BBC News*, 19 Mar 2023.

## SIDELINES...

### DINO DISPUTE

Antiques dealer John Webb has created an uproar in the quiet seaside town of Cullen in Scotland by installing a giant *Tyrannosaurus rex* head, rescued from a defunct fairground, on the roof of his shop. Painted in psychedelic colours by a local artist, it lights up at night and has not been welcomed by neighbours, who say it is "not in keeping" with the surrounding architecture. After the council insisted it needs planning permission, supporters, who see it as "quirky" and "fun", dubbed the head "Plannerwhosaurus Wrecks", but Webb says it is only there until someone buys it for "something around £10,000". *mirror.co.uk*, 23 Mar 2023.

### SUPERANNUATED STUDENT

Hyejeong Shin, 29, was arrested after it was discovered she had enrolled in New Brunswick High School, New Jersey, and spent four days posing as a student there. She was rumbled when her birth certificate was found to be false. Her case recalls that of Brian MacKinnon, who managed to pose as a 17-year-old at a high school near Glasgow for a whole year in 1993, despite being 30. *BBC News*, 26 Jan 2023.

### DRUNKEN BOAT

After a houseboat sank on the Bridgewater canal in Eccles, Greater Manchester, emergency services used an underwater camera to investigate the wreck and ensure no one was aboard. Instead, they found that the boat was stacked full of bottles and cans of beer, the weight of which had caused the vessel to keel over and sink. *msn.com*, 28 Jan 2023.

### FISHTANK TSUNAMI

A massive fish tank in the DomAquaree complex in Berlin that held the world record for the largest freestanding cylindrical aquarium unexpectedly burst in December, causing a 250,000-gallon (946,000l) tsunami to surge through the complex and out into the street, killing over 1,500 fish and devastating shops and a hotel lobby. "It is suspected that the acrylic tank might have ruptured because of stresses caused by unusually cold weather." *insider.com*, 16 Dec 2022.





## SIDELINES...

### DOH!

Prosecutors in Poland issued a statement saying they were investigating “a violent release of energy” at the national police HQ, which had led to Police Commander in Chief Jarosław Szymczyk being hospitalised. Polish newspapers were more direct, alleging Szymczyk had accidentally fired a grenade launcher, given to him on a visit to Ukraine, in his office, causing an explosion. *theguardian.com*, 16 Dec 2022.

### SMASHING

Following an argument with staff about a missing laptop at a hotel in Shanghai, a 28-year-old man stormed out, then returned in a car which he smashed through the entrance and drove wildly round the foyer destroying furniture and ornaments and sending guests fleeing for cover. Fortunately, no one was injured, and police ended his violent spree and arrested him. *BBC News*, 12 Jan 2023.

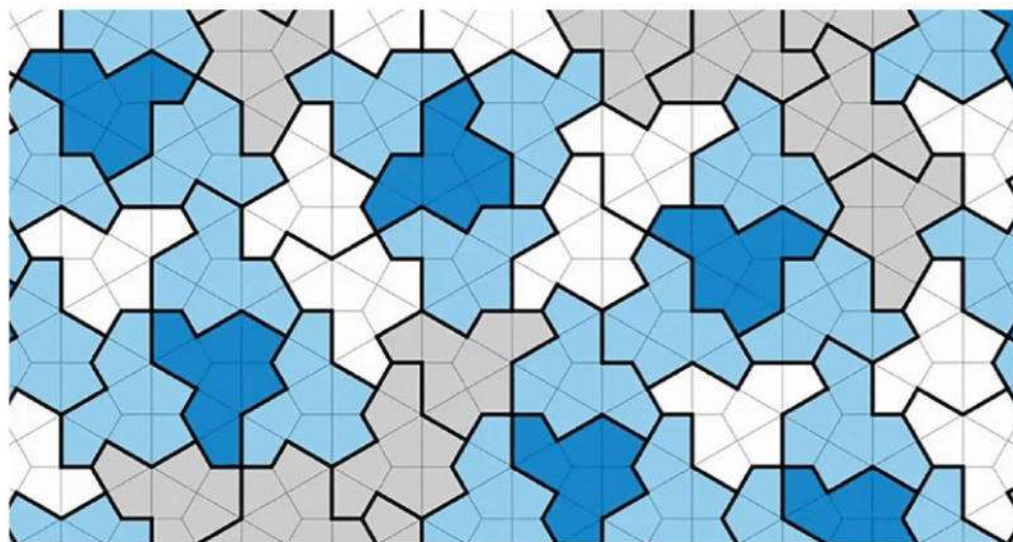
### NOT WORRYING AT ALL

Researchers at the Academy of Military Sciences in Beijing have published a paper in the Chinese-language journal *Military Medical Sciences* detailing an experiment that used a common gene-editing tool to insert a gene from tardigrades, the tiny but notoriously tough invertebrates, into human embryonic stem cells. This resulted in the cells having a greatly increased resistance to radiation, which the researchers said could lead to the creation of ‘super-soldiers’ who could survive nuclear fallout. While they insist their work is “totally legal”, other scientists are disturbed by the ethical implications. *scmp.com*, 29 Mar 2023.



MARTIN ROSS

## A TIP OF THE HAT | Yorkshire ‘shape hobbyist’ stuns mathematicians with his tile discovery



ABOVE: The aperiodic monotile, or einstein, dubbed ‘The Hat’. BELOW: Craig Kaplan holding one of the tiles.

If you tile a surface, no matter what shape the tile you use is, the pattern almost always repeats. Mathematicians, though, have long sought a tile shape that can produce a pattern that never repeats, what is termed an “aperiodic monotile”, also known as an “einstein”. This has nothing to do with the famous physicist but comes from the German “ein stein”, meaning “one stone”. In the 1970s, mathematician Roger Penrose, who later won a Nobel Prize for his work on black holes, came up with his famed Penrose Tiles. These initially involved four shapes that together would tile a surface without repeating, and he was later able to refine the shapes so that it could be done with just two tiles, but he never found a single shape that would tile a surface aperiodically. He did, though, successfully sue a toilet paper manufacturer who used his tile shapes to make patterns on quilted loo roll. Now, David Smith, 64, a retired printing technician from Bridlington in East Yorkshire, who describes himself as a “shape hobbyist”, has cracked the problem. He has discovered a shape he calls “The Hat” and has published a paper with three co-authors who have the expertise to provide the formal mathematical proofs that

the Hat is indeed an einstein.

“I am always messing about and experimenting with shapes,” says Smith, who has been “obsessively intrigued” by the einstein problem for years. He worked on the problem with specialist tiling software, but once he sensed a shape had potential, he used a cutting machine to make 32 copies in card that he would then fit together to be sure there were no gaps or overlaps. The Hat is not a new geometric invention; it is made up of eight kites, a well-known geometric shape derived from hexagons. One of Smith’s collaborators, Craig Kaplan, from the University of Waterloo in Canada, said, “I like to think it was hiding in plain sight”, while Marjorie Senechal of Smith College, Massachusetts, added, “It’s sitting right in the hexagons. How many people are going to be kicking themselves... wondering why didn’t I see that?”

Smith has also found a second einstein, known as “The Turtle” and another collaborator, software developer Joseph Myers, has

found that not only are the two related, but they lead to a whole family of einsteins, and he has come up with a new tool for demonstrating aperiodicity as a result. The maths seemed “too good to be true,” he said, “but everything seemed to hold together as I wrote up the details.” Smith was as stunned by this development as anyone else, saying of the research paper: “I was no help to be honest. I’m more of a picture person.” However, this was not the end; to tile a surface aperiodically both the Hat and the turtle need to be flipped every so often to their mirror image, and Smith has now topped those with a third new einstein, “The Spectre”. This is officially a non-reflective einstein and can tile a surface aperiodically without needing to be flipped. “This is the kind of thing that ought

not to happen, but very happily for the history of science does happen occasionally, where a flash brings us the answer all at once,” said Kaplan. *NY Times International Edition*, 5 Apr; *Rawstory.com*, 10 Jun 2023.



DAVID SMITH, JOSEPH SAMUEL MYERS, CRAIG S KAPLAN, CHAIM GOODMAN-STRAUSS

UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO





# CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

## 286: THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT MARY

With 967,000 Google sites and innumerable books and articles, you're spoiled for choice. The *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* provides a cornucopia of primary source references. Then you can hum the Beatles' 'Let it Be', before viewing Jean-Luc Godard's characteristically idiosyncratic *Marie, Je Vous Salue*.

To paraphrase Bogart in *Casablanca*, of all the women in all the world why did God choose Mary? Why a married woman? The scheme would have worked better with a presumed virgin maid. A virgin birth was required to compete with the plethora of such in classical and other ancient religions, also in consonance with the OT (Isaiah 7. 14) prophecy of same.

Assuming Joseph was her husband rather than just (as alluded to in the NT) fiancé, why had they not had marital relations? Could the narrative have been influenced by the *Electra* of Euripides in which the peasant husband leaves her untouched out of respect for her royal status?

Mentioned 16 times in the NT, mainly in the nativity context, Mary is routinely described as *Parthenos* – cf. the Parthenon, named in honour of Athens's virginal divine protectress Athene. This word can of course mean Virgin; cf. her appellation *Virgo* in Jerome's Vulgate. However (countless examples in Lampe's *Patristic Greek Lexicon*), it has various other connotations ranging from faithful bride to widow. This semantic point is seized on by disbelievers ancient and modern, led by a number of early heretical sects.

The Koran, which mentions Mary 32 times (twice as often as the NT), repeatedly stresses her virginity, especially in Sura 19, devoted to her. Why did Islam arrive at this conclusion? From which particular sources, written or verbal? Questions not always asked. Jerome has been described as the person who made Virginity and the Birth central Christian tenets, but Islamic scholars were much more familiar with Greek texts than Latin.

The so-called *Protovangelium* or Gospel of James the brother of Jesus (see later for him), datable to c. AD 145, is the earliest source outside the NT for Mary's virginity before and after the Nativity. According to this, a sceptical friend of the midwife sticks her hand inside Mary's vagina after the birth and has it blasted by holy fire – after repenting, she is healed.

The fourth-century Bishop of Salamis,



Epiphanius, rages (*Panarion* 26.8.1 – 26.9.5) against such Gnostic tracts as *The Greater Questions of Mary*, in which Jesus takes Mary up a mountain, magically produces a woman, starts to have sex with her, this turning into *cætus interruptus* and seminal consumption before Mary unsurprisingly faints.

Content apart, these and sundry other so-called Gospels and cognate tracts are a reminder of how many competing books were rejected by the committee that eventually edited and produced what we call the New Testament.

These 'fortean' tales may induce a sense of virgin on the ridiculous. A distinction has to be drawn between belief in the Virgin Birth and that of Mary's perpetual chastity. From the fourth century on, the latter notion prevailed in Eastern and Western Christendom, expressed by many individuals down to (e.g.) Cranmer and Luther, confirmed by various Church Councils, embellishing her status with the title 'Ever-Virgin'. One good example is the Nativity Hymn by Romanos the Melode (6th-century Byzantine hymnographer and church official – it is still sung on Christmas Eve in the Greek Church), in which there is repeated description of Mary's vagina as 'a sealed door'.

Parthenogenesis is an accepted scientific fact in the insect world. As to humans, there have been genuine or spurious reports of a virgin impregnated by a vagabond sperm generated by non-penetrative 'heavy petting' somehow bypassing the girl's hymen. In the once-famous Russell Case (aka the Ampthill Baby Case), wife Christabel claimed she had become pregnant from innocently using a semen-tinged sponge.

The NT and other sources state that

Jesus had four brothers and two sisters. Some explain this away by claiming that these words need not be taken literally. Others maintain they were Joseph's children from a previous marriage.

The former notion is a good reminder of how much theology is based on arguments over semantic niceties, going back to the Arian controversy over Christ's human-divine nature, with which Edward Gibbon had typically great fun.

A modern Gibbon might ask where these pre-Marian children were when the couple trekked to Bethlehem? – left home alone with Macauley Culkin? How did they respond to having the Son of God as a sibling? Did he get extra portions at mealtimes? What did they talk about?

In Acts 1.14, these 'Brethren' and Mary join the Apostles in 'the upper-room' after Jesus's Ascension, after which she vanishes from the New Testament. Why this abrupt departure? If, as many believe, the Gospels are historical, why didn't their authors know what became of her? If, as many believe, they are fictitious, why didn't they come up with a suitably spectacular finale?

Some subsequent church tradition has her bodily elevated up to Heaven. Islam imagines her buried at the foot of the Mount of Olives in the Kidron Valley. Both seem rather tame for a BVM...

The earliest recorded vision of Mary occurred to St Gregory 'The Wonder-Worker' (AD 213-70), written up in a treatise of the same name by church father Gregory of Nyssa (Migne's *Patrologia Græca*, vol46 pp893-958). After her official adoption as the *Theotokos* (Mother of God) by the Council of Ephesus (431), she stepped up her appearances, especially as military defender of Constantinople against its many enemies.

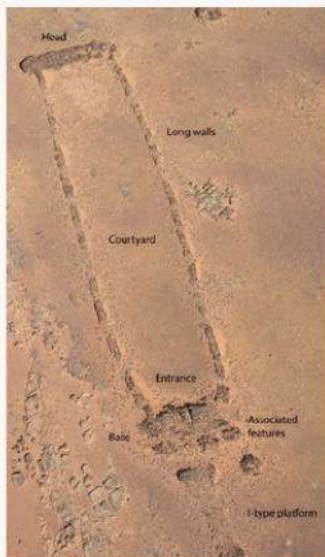
Innumerable modern claims are notorious. Some are officially accepted, many ridiculed though clung to by fervent believers. For catalogues, see Kevin McClure's *The Evidence for Visions of the Virgin Mary* (1983) and Chris Maunder's *Apparitions of Mary in Twentieth-Century Catholic Europe* (2006).

Hard to pick a favourite epiphany. Mine are probably her appearance on a Mexican tortilla (YouTube) and on Coogee Beach in Sydney (hilariously written up by Michelle Cazzulino, *D. Telegraph*, 31 Jan 2003).

"Lady Madonna, baby at your breast Wonder how you manage to feed the rest..." (Beatles)



PAUL SIEVEKING enjoys a bird's-eye view of some recent discoveries in the Arabian desert



## MUSTATILS

Mustatils, huge stone monuments concentrated in northern Saudi Arabia, were the site of rituals and early pilgrimages according to new research. Researchers discovered the first mustatils, dating back to the Late Neolithic period, in the 1970s. Since then, 16,000 have been discovered, primarily in northern Saudi Arabia. Mustatils are rectangular, low-walled, stone structures that range from 20m (66ft) to 600m (1,968ft) in length. The researchers identified 7,000-year-old fragments of animal skulls and horns, primarily from domestic cattle, found close to a large upright stone that is part of a 140m/460ft-long mustatil located 55 miles (88km) east of the city of AlUla. The close proximity likely indicates the area is a site of animal offerings.

"We believe these remains are offerings to an unknown deity or deities represented by the central stone," said Melissa Kennedy of the University of Western Australia. "We speculate that the mustatils were built as a form of community bonding, with multiple groups coming together to construct them. We also suggest that there may be an association with water, as most mustatils point towards areas that hold water. As such, there may be a link with ancient climate and environmental change as Arabia gradually became increasingly arid, like it is today [...] The fact that similar religious belief spread across a huge area is unparalleled anywhere in the world at this early date." *vice.com*, 15 Mar 2023.

**"It is amazing we can see this moment in time played out at a landscape scale"**

## ROMAN MILITARY CAMPS IN ARABIA

Studying satellite images, University of Oxford researchers have identified three new Roman fortified camps across the desert of northern Arabia. The discovery may be evidence of potential surprise attacks during a previously undiscovered Roman military campaign linked to the Roman takeover of the Nabataean Kingdom, a civilisation centred on Petra in Jordan.

Dr Michael Fradley, who led the research, said: "We are almost certain they were built by the Roman army, given the typical playing card shape of the enclosures with opposing entrances along each side. The level of preservation of the camps is really remarkable, particularly as they may have only been used for a matter of days or weeks. They went along a peripheral caravan route linking Bayir and Dumat al-Jandal. This suggests a strategy to bypass the more used route down the Wadi Sirhan, adding an element of surprise to the attack. It is amazing that we can see this moment in time played out at a landscape scale."

Professor Andrew Wilson, a

co-author on the paper, said: "These marching camps – if we are correct in dating them to the early second century – suggest the Roman annexation of the Nabataean kingdom following the death of the last king, Rabbel II Soter, in AD 106, was not an entirely straightforward affair, and that Rome moved quickly to secure the kingdom." Because the distance between each camp is 37km to 44km (23-27 miles), the researchers speculate it was too far to be crossed by infantry in a day. Therefore they suggest the camps were instead built by a cavalry unit who could travel over such barren terrain in a single day, possibly on camels.

On the basis of the distance between the camps, there is also a suggestion that another camp may have been located further west at the later Umayyad fort and well station at Bayir. The study sets out that the newly discovered camps run in a straight line towards Dumat al-Jandal in what is now Saudi Arabia, but which was then a settlement in the east of the Nabataean kingdom. *[RTE] 27 Apr 2023.*

## ROMAN COINS FROM THE BALTIC

Two silver coins from the Roman Empire have been unearthed on a plateau above a beach, marked by old fireplaces on the remote and uninhabited island of Gotska Sandön ("Sand Island") in the Baltic Sea,





**RIGHT:** The 1,100-year-old breastplate that may contain early Cyrillic text. **BELOW RIGHT:** The enormous stone face said to represent Harakbut, the ancient guardian of El Dorado.

halfway between Sweden and Estonia. The denarii were minted in the reigns of Trajan (AD 98-117) and Antonius Pius (AD 138-161). Swedish archaeologist Johan Rönby, part of the team that found the coins with metal detectors in March, said the coins could have stayed in circulation for a long time, because the silver they contained always remained valuable, and they might have been brought to the island by Norse traders who had taken shelter there from storms at sea. Or maybe they were carried there by survivors from a shipwreck: the waters around the island are notoriously dangerous, and the area is littered with wrecks. Another possibility is that the coins were taken to Gotska Sandön by Romans on a Roman ship, though no records of such a voyage into the Baltic exist. "It's not likely to be a Roman ship," Rönby said, "but you have to consider that the Romans were sailing up to Scotland, and that there were Roman authors at that time writing about the Baltic area."

Roman coins have also been found on the larger island of Gotland about 25 miles (40km) to the south, but that was perhaps to be expected because it was the location of several towns. Gotska Sandön, however, has no towns or villages. It is uninhabited today but was home to lighthouse keepers in the 19th century. Before that it was known as a place of shipwrecks and as a haunt for pirates. *livescience.com*, *heritagedaily.com*, 15 April 2023.

### EL DORADO'S GUARDIAN

This enormous stone face towers over a waterfall that empties into a lagoon; it is said to represent Harakbut, the ancient guardian of El Dorado. Sir Walter Raleigh claimed to have found this city of great wealth in 1594, though it is possibly mere fable. El Dorado is Spanish for "the golden one". According to folklore, the city was made of gold, and the inhabitants were thought to have covered themselves in gold dust. They are also said to have possessed many magical powers. The city is rumoured to lie somewhere north of present-day Colombia, accessible only during the rainy season. It has inspired numerous expeditions, books and films. Some think it might be found in the Madre de Dios province of southeastern Peru's mountainous jungle.

Local people call the face *Incacok*, which means 'Inca Face' in the Amarakaeri language. According to legend, the last remaining member of the sacred Harakbut people, guardian of the lost city and its treasures, was cursed by the gods



and turned to stone, now visible as the monumental Face of Harakbut. Elders say there are two larger monolithic faces in the forest, connected by ancient subterranean passageways leading to the huge city – but everyone who knew how to get there has passed away. To reach it, you must fight pumas, jaguars, huge snakes, and other dangerous creatures. Yeah, right. *mysteriesunsolved.com*, 17 Sept 2022.

### EARLIEST PLAGUE EVIDENCE

Researchers have found 4,000-year-old plague DNA in Britain – the oldest evidence of the disease in the country. They have identified three cases of *Yersinia pestis*, the bacteria causing the plague, in human remains – two in a mass burial in Somerset, and one in a ring cairn monument in Cumbria. The team took small skeletal samples from 34 individuals looking for the presence of *Yersinia pestis* in teeth (dental pulp traps the DNA of infectious diseases).

The researchers identified three cases of *Yersinia pestis* in two children, thought to be 10 to 12 years old when they died, and one woman aged between 35 and 45. It is likely the three people lived at roughly the

same time. This strain of the plague (the late Neolithic and Bronze Age lineage) was most likely brought into central and western Europe around 4,800 years ago by humans expanding into Eurasia. *BBC News*, 31 May 2023.

### OLDEST CYRILLIC TEXT?

An inscription on a 1,100-year-old breastplate found in a ruined fortress in Bulgaria may contain one of the earliest known examples of Cyrillic text. "The text was written on a lead plate worn on the chest to protect the wearer from trouble and evil," said Ivallo Kanev, a Bulgarian archaeologist leading the team excavating the fortress, on the border between Greece and Bulgaria. The inscription refers to two supplicants named Pavel and Dimitar and dates to the time of Tsar Simeon I (aka Simeon the Great) who ruled the Bulgarian Empire between AD 893 and 927. Based on how the letters are written and the location of the inscription within the fortress, "this text probably got into the fortress in the period between 916 and 927 and was brought by a Bulgarian military garrison," said Kanev. *livescience.com*, 20 May 2023.





## More heat than light

DAVID HAMBLING says that historical climate change can offer no guide to our current situation

*Fortean Times* is the broadest of churches, with scope for many contrasting views, but Barry Baldwin's column on climate change from a classical history perspective deserves a response from the science corner.

In "Weather Or...?" (FT431:15), he notes historical instances of hotter and colder conditions which cannot have been caused by human pollutants. He suggests that the "the overall pattern is that there is no pattern," that the current climate change may be the result of variations in solar output. In conclusion he says: "I recommend a crash course in meteorological history to Greta [Thunberg] and co."

Climate Change was once an unexplained phenomenon shrouded in mystery, as described in "Climate of Confusion" from 1995 (FT83:14), but the science has moved on. This includes extensive studies of historical climate, from contemporary accounts to assembling detailed worldwide data from tree rings, ice cores and other sources going back tens of thousands of years and more.

All agree that Earth's climate has varied hugely throughout its long history. There have been ice ages when conditions were far colder than the present, and long hot eras, the most recent ending 40 million years ago, when the polar ice caps completely disappeared.

A second point of agreement is that changes in the amount of sunlight reaching us (or more particularly, which hemisphere gets most sunlight) have been the driving factor in the last million years. This is specifically true of the recurrent cycles of ice ages and interglacial periods which have been driven by small variations in the geometry of Earth's axis and its orbit around the Sun.

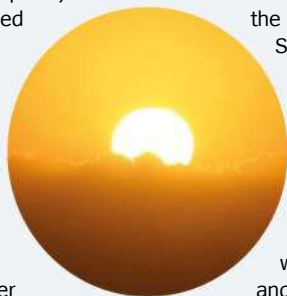
Temperatures began to rise about 18,000 years ago, after the last ice age. They peaked around 6,000 years ago at a time known as the Holocene Maximum. Since then temperatures have been trending downwards as we head towards the next ice age.

There have been three anomalies in this trend. One of these was 2,000 years ago during the Roman Empire. After a period of cooling, this was followed by the Mediæval

### Climate change was once an unexplained phenomenon shrouded in mystery

Warm Period, around AD 900-1300, when the Vikings settled Greenland where conditions were then mild. The Mediæval Warm Period is now believed to have been driven by reduced volcanic activity and increased solar output.

Despite this history, climate scientists are pretty much unanimous in rejecting the idea that the Sun is causing the currently observed climate change, with a landslide 97% agreeing that this time around, human activity is responsible. How can they be so sure?



Satellite sensors have been tracking the amount of energy from the Sun reaching the Earth since 1978, and this has not increased. Further, if the Sun were responsible for global warming, we would see warming all the way from the surface to the upper atmosphere. Instead we see warming at the surface and cooling in the stratosphere, indicating the cause is a build-up of heat-trapping gases near Earth's surface.

Climate change is a complex series of feedback loops. For example, higher temperatures mean that more ice melts. Reduced ice cover means less sunlight is reflected into space, so temperatures rise further, and more ice melts. The multiple loops interacting with each other make untangling cause and effect particularly challenging. But in recent decades scientists have developed 'fingerprinting' techniques to home in on specific areas to see where climate change is most pronounced and whether this corresponds to areas of human activity.

Two specific human fingerprints have emerged, one relating to patterns of drought and extreme rainfall, the other the movement of the Intertropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ), a belt of low pressure that encircles the Earth near the equator. As the balance of greenhouse gases and particulate pollutants shifted, the impact was clearly visible on the changing maps of

both rainfall and pressure.

The Classical Corner mentions a piece from the SPACE website in 2013 which Mr Baldwin believes supports the solar variability theory. But while the piece highlights the Sun as being the '800-pound gorilla' of the climate with the power to change everything, the key quote is from Greg Kopp at the University of Colorado.

"While solar changes have historically caused climate changes, the Sun is mostly likely responsible for less than 15 per cent of the global temperature increases we've seen over the last century, during which human-caused changes such as increased greenhouse gases caused the majority of warming," says Kopp.

All the evidence points to the chief cause being human-produced carbon dioxide. This consensus on CO<sub>2</sub> from human activity as the driver for climate change has been formed by increasingly powerful models of how the greenhouse effect works. These models have continued to make accurate predictions of climate change as CO<sub>2</sub> levels have increased relentlessly.

The current trend suggests we will hit an average of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels by 2027. By 2060 this will rise to 2°C, with a marked increase in heatwaves, droughts, flooding and extreme weather events. Scientists are cautious about linking any particular hurricane or blizzard to climate change, but the growing field of attribution studies shows increasingly strong links between CO<sub>2</sub> levels and the number of extreme events.

Greta Thunberg has always insisted, rather too noisily for some, that we need to follow the science. Meteorological history can help our understanding of climate change and its impact. Knowing how previous changes have brought about the rise and fall of empires should help us appreciate the seriousness of what we now face.

As Mr Baldwin points out, there have always been prophets of doom, and fortunately in the past they have always been wrong. Unfortunately, the prophets this time are armed with masses of precise data and testable computer models rather than supposed divine visions. The good news is that these prophets also tell us what we need to do to avoid catastrophe. Cutting carbon dioxide emissions may be inconvenient, but failing to do it is going to bring global catastrophe in the next few decades.



# THE C NSPIRASPHERE

The fate of the *Titan* made news headlines around the world, but other, stranger stories soon bubbled to the surface. **NOEL ROONEY** descends into the Conspirasphere's murky waters...

## DEEP DIVES

The loss of the submersible *Titan* on a trip to view the wreckage of the *Titanic* captured the attention of the world's news media, and with it, much of the world's attention too. For five days, reports appeared agonising over the air supply, the (apparently desultory, according to some) rescue efforts, and the people on board. Some of the reports hinted at the mysterious legacy of the original disaster, as if all activities connected to the illustrious wreck were doomed.

In the Conspirasphere, the drama was equally gripping, but for different reasons. Old stories resurfaced, of course; how the *Titanic* was secretly withdrawn from service at the last moment and replaced by her sister ship in a gargantuan insurance swindle; that the wreckage contained secrets in the form of gold bullion, personal wealth and the revealing diaries of the super-rich; that the unfortunate passengers and crew were sacrificed in a covert assassination attempt (here choose your own favourite victim; plenty of others have done so) or a mistaken act of war.

But the C-sphere is rarely content just to rehash old mysteries when there are new ones to uncover. And, apparently, there are mysteries aplenty surrounding the catastrophic event. While the mainstream investigated the technical aspects of the disaster – whether the craft was actually seaworthy, for instance – the conspiracists dived a little deeper.

It all starts with the people who were on board. They are the dots around which the pattern forms. And, so it is said, there is more to the doomed crew than meets the eye.

The CEO of OceanGate,



## *Stead regaled passengers with tales of a mummy's curse*

the company that runs the trips, was on board. Stockton Rush had a curious link to the original *Titanic* event; his wife, Wendy Rush, is the great-great-granddaughter of Isidor and Ida Straus, who lost their lives when they allowed other women and children to get to the lifeboats before them. More ominous than conspiratorial, that connection, but a conspiracy theory has to start somewhere.

Hamish Harding, a British businessman and explorer, had been on a number of risky expeditions, and belonged to the most privileged segment of the tourist industry; he had taken part in a record-breaking dive in the Mariana Trench and been into space with Blue Origin. He had also accompanied astronaut Buzz Aldrin to the North Pole, and some in the C-sphere found this significant (particularly given what follows); though quite how or why I am unable to fathom.

Paul Henri Nargeolet, an ex-naval diver from France, was known as 'Mr Titanic'. He was part of the first expedition to visit the wreck, in 1987,

LEFT: The *Titan* submersible.

and helped to salvage a 20-ton section of the hull (known in *Titanic* folklore as 'the big piece'), as well as thousands of other artefacts. He probably knew more about the wreckage than anyone else; which one can translate into C-sphere parlance as 'he knew too much about the wreckage'. Titillating, perhaps, and circumstantial evidence leading towards a conspiracy, if one cares to read it that way, but hardly a smoking gun.

The Devil, as any good conspiracist will tell you, is in the smallest of details; the seemingly insignificant fact is usually the lynchpin of the theory. In this case, that detail concerns the other people on the trip: British businessman Shahzada Dawood and his son Suleman. Dawood Senior was, it transpires, on the board of SETI, and this was deemed Very Significant by a procession of breathless commentators making off-hand references to HAARP; several sources claimed that the mainstream media were hiding this fact, though I found it on a BBC report. But there is, allegedly, more.

The next step of logic is rather harder to justify. Dawood was originally from Pakistan, and a Muslim; this, apparently, makes him more or less Indian, and thus entitles us to make a connection with ancient Indian theories about life after death. Why would we want to do such a thing? Leaving aside the whiff of closet racism, it's not easy to see why SETI and the afterlife are connected.

The answer, it appears, lies with the corpses that still inhabit the *Titanic*'s wreckage. If you have viewed video from the wreck, you may well have had the dubious privilege of seeing some of those corpses; footage of them occasionally gets tacked

on to otherwise respectable videos. Apparently deep sea water preserves bodies after death (though how it protects them from the attentions of scavengers and predators is another matter).

It seems there were ancient Egyptian artefacts on board, brought by one of the surviving passengers, Margaret Brown. And WT Stead, the British newspaper editor and Spiritualist, regaled passengers with tales of a mummy's curse (Stead went down with the ship; see **FT136:40-43; 287**). There are stories about a séance conducted by, or on behalf of, Stead's daughter, during which participants apparently saw the souls of doomed passengers being ripped from their bodies and joining a spectral procession destined for the afterlife.

Another séance report has Stead, in the moments after his death, surrounded by a posse of clamouring souls, engaged in helping them find their way to the next phase of their existence. It should be noted here that Stead had something of a posthumous habit of popping up at séances; perhaps there was something he really needed to say.

So a sunken behemoth, a cache of ancient artefacts, a mummy's curse, a psychopomp on post-mortem duty; a leading light in SETI and an astronaut's companion. These are the ingredients of the developing conspiracy theory; and a heady, if unwieldy, brew they make. Maybe not the weirdest addition to the canon of *Titanic* lore, but pretty damn close.

[http://whitecrowbooks.com/michaeltymn/entry/remembering\\_titanic\\_victim\\_william\\_t\\_stead\\_100\\_years\\_later](http://whitecrowbooks.com/michaeltymn/entry/remembering_titanic_victim_william_t_stead_100_years_later); <https://rense.com/general97/why-was-the-titanic-bound-sub-destroyed.php>





## Lost boys and girls

ALAN MURDIE finds that ghostly children can often elicit strong emotional reactions



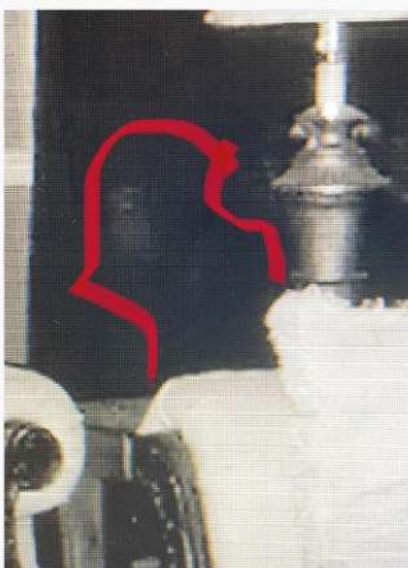
ABOVE: A ghostly child in the 2021 film *A Savannah Haunting*. BELOW: Ghosthunter Kalani Smith spent a couple of nights in the allegedly haunted house where the film was shot, capturing what he described as the 'side profile of a little girl' on one of his popular TikTok videos.

Of all the types of apparition you might see, the ghost of a lost child must surely rate as one of the most poignant. It is the variety most likely to bring forth a sympathetic reaction rather than a fearful response in the eyewitness, and collectively on the part of any audience told of one.

The enthusiastic reaction to a ghostly image interpreted as the 'side profile of a little girl' when released in April 2021 suggests a strong emotional appeal and resonance inherent in reports of spectral children. Obtained at a reputedly haunted house in Savannah in Georgia, USA, and posted on TikTok by Kalani Smith, 24, a ghost hunter from Nashville, Tennessee, by the middle of January 2023 it had garnered some 12.8 million views.

Smith states his image was captured in the house where the horror movie *A Savannah Haunting* was filmed back in 2021. For decades the house has allegedly been haunted by the ghost of a little girl who supposedly died inside, the property being previously owned by the family of the film's director William Mark McCullough. In *A Savannah Haunting*, a grief-stricken mother and family move into the house following the death of a daughter by drowning. Once inside their new home they

During the couple's lengthy vigil a number of different ghosthunting devices were employed



are troubled by eerie incidents leading them to believe their daughter's spirit has followed them. Though McCullough never lived there himself, he confirms that sometimes when visiting he experienced "creepy" occurrences.

That was enough for Kalani Smith, who, together with his wife (and presumably after seeing the film) decided to camp over at the house for four days. The couple had the uneasy feeling of being watched, with Mr Smith declaring the building possesses a "unique energy". During their lengthy vigil a number of different ghost-hunting devices deployed were triggered. Mr Smith rates his film of the white shape as "one of his best catches to date." One wonders if anyone will take steps to find out if a girl ever really did die inside the building. ("Ghost hunter spots 'little girl' lurking in 'haunted' house used to film horror movie", *D.M. & D.Mirror*, 17 Jan 2023.)

Whatever the case, the powerful emotional responses displayed towards ghost reports which feature a child at their centre is an aspect that will surely prove most interesting to participants in a new academic project launched at Worcester University in May 2023. Entitled 'Haunting Issues: Children, Spectrality and Culture'





**ABOVE LEFT:** Busy Tennessee ghosthunter Kalani Smith, whose videos draw large online audiences. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Dr Lucy Arnold is investigating “the figure of the child ghost”, but from the relative safety of the University of Worcester.

and funded by the Art and Humanities Research Council, the project will examine the role of ghostly children within culture. Research will be undertaken by a network co-founded by Dr Lucy Arnold, Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Worcester, who describes her interests as the “contemporary gothic, narratives of haunting and contemporary women’s writing”.

The project was inspired after she kept noticing how “the figure of the child ghost – whether literal or metaphorical – kept recurring with increasing frequency”, leading Dr Arnold to consider “what these narratives of child ghosts might be telling us about how we think about the figure of the child and the experience of childhood in our present moment”.

She states: “Ghost stories are frequently used as vehicles to think about individuals, events, voices or even communities who are marginalised, forgotten or ignored.”

Drawing together academics from 15 different universities in the UK, the EU, North America and Australia, it will seek out “what else we might find with this important recurring use of the ghost child that hasn’t been identified before.” A series of international workshops and academic presentations are planned involving partners from the charitable, cultural, heritage and arts sectors and the public. (*Worcester News*, 18 Feb 2023; *Evesham Observer*, 10 May 2023).

Whether Dr Arnold and colleagues will actually go ghost hunting themselves I don’t know, but my bet is they will not have to look very far or for very long to find stories of ghostly missing or lost children.

These recur repeatedly in both traditional and modern ghost reports as well as in fiction.

For instance, in August last year an online ‘ghost-child’ controversy erupted after a woman posted a report of hearing a toddler sobbing pitifully in a York street and then searching for it in vain, leaving her wondering if it was a phantom. This experience occurred not in the historic York centre traversed by the city’s long-established ghost walks, but nearly a mile and half distant, in Brunswick Street, a residential area.

The posting on the *Nextdoor* hyperlocal social networking service prompted speculation she heard the cry of a ‘ghost-child’ dating from the ‘Baedeker’ bombing raid on York in 1942 that killed scores of people. Others were encouraged to come forward with their own stories, including one man who said he and friends all heard the sound of a child sobbing for its mother back in 1977-78.

Another person living on Sutherland Street also reported hearing a distraught child crying a few times, but never seeing anyone around after investigating. Other on-line correspondents criticised these responses, saying the police should have been called, while others proposed it was merely foxes or cats or even sound effects from an episode of the latterly children-fixated TV series *Doctor Who* which people were hearing. (Source: “Child’s pitiful cry in York Street sparks ghost debate”, *York Press*, 6 Aug 2022.)

In November 2022, Marc Cox, 54, a former gravedigger living in a house in a corner of Witton cemetery in Birmingham,

reported his home being haunted by “the Grey Girl” or the “little girl in the window”. With long black hair draped over her face, she looks out through the back window of his house. Mr Cox said: “I didn’t think anything of her at the time, but a few years later I was approached by a group of mourners who I got chatting to. I told them I lived alone and they asked: ‘Who’s that girl we always see in your window?’”

“There’s a comfort in it,” he says. “I think she looks after me. She’s never done me any harm.” Affectionately, he calls her ‘Amy’. (*Birmingham Mail*, 6 Nov 2022.)

Similar stories of ghostly children are found across the country. At West Malling, Kent, a little girl in a Victorian dress has been seen by children in a bedroom of a 1920s council house in Norman Road (*Kent Messenger*, 27 Oct 2022). In Aberdeen, staff from the former Jones shoe shop on Union Street heard a child’s voice shouting “What’s that?” while a young girl murdered in the city at Urquhart Road in the 1930s appears on the first step of the stairs of a building three streets away. (*Aberdeen pressandjournal.co.uk*, 31 Oct 2020; *Aberdeen’s Haunted Heritage* by Graeme Milne, 2021.) In Stroud, Gloucestershire, staff at House of Fraser see apparitions of two little girls and a little boy around the stock rooms at the top of the building (*Stroud News and Journal*, 28 Oct 2018). In Sussex, the *Brighton Argus* of 11 May 2018 reported how talk continued locally of people seeing a dejected two-year-old boy sitting on a step close to where the ‘Bears and Friends’ toy shop once stood in Meeting House Lane, Brighton, also prowled by a Grey Lady.





ABOVE: Burnima Homestead, touted as 'Most Haunted House in Australia'. BELOW: Mark Cox is quite fond of the Witton Cemetery ghost he calls 'Amy'.

Many traditional British ghost stories feature a murder or suicide connected with the cover-up of an unwanted pregnancy or illegitimate birth, or the removal of inconvenient offspring (e.g. Wayland Wood, Norfolk, the inspiration for 'The Babes in the Wood' legend; Littlecote House in Wiltshire; Old Soar Manor House, Kent, and Chicksands Priory, Bedfordshire, to give but a few). Frequently in these stories, the men concerned seek to evade their responsibilities and dispose violently of the woman and/or child or children with the ghosts of the victims haunting thereafter.

The ghostly lost child is a theme also found in Australia. Burnima Homestead is a mansion at Bombala, New South Wales, built in 1896 for one Henry Tollemache Edwards. In 2018 current owner Steve Rickett said: "After moving in, it didn't take long before I realised there were the presences of others here." He recalled many strange incidents including phantom phone calls, unexplained hammering and a 'shuffling wardrobe'.

In particular, he suffered a disturbed night when sleeping in the old cook's room in 2006. At about 2.30am he was awoken by heavy breathing at his bedside. "I turned over towards the noise only to see a girl standing right along my bed. I screamed at it, kicked the doona [an Australian type of quilt] at it and it vanished." An adult female apparition has



also been spotted in the garden. To reduce his anxieties, Mr Ricketts "never watches any thriller television shows or movies as it heightens the senses". As the literature of psychical research confirms, the early hours are a peak time for witnessing apparitions.

A Burnima legend holds that back in the days when girls scarcely reached puberty before entering domestic service, a young maidservant became pregnant by Edwards, and later vanished the same day when a well in the garden was filled in. Apparently, no one has yet dug up the well.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Burnima now

vies for the title of the 'Most Haunted House in Australia'. For those familiar with speculation in the literature concerning the infamous Borley Rectory in Essex – 'the Most Haunted House in England' – this rumour echoes gossip about concealed pregnant serving girls and wall-writings containing the cryptic message, "Well tank bottom me", which investigator Harry Price considered "appears to direct investigators to look in the well". (See *Bega District News*, 21 Nov 2015; *Canberra Times*, 24 April 2018; *The Enigma of Borley Rectory* (1996) Ivan Banks.)

Generally, phantom children are perceived as plaintive, sad or neutral presences in the landscape, often briefly glimpsed and rather undramatic, seldom prompting fear. Most fit the notion of the 'recording' type of ghost, being 'seen and not heard'. Nonetheless, in common with their living counterparts, some can display bad behaviour and prove a nuisance.

Some hair-raising tales of unhappy, frightful and malicious ghostly children were told by Elliot O'Donnell (1873-1965). In *Haunted Churches* (1939), he averred the ghost of a murdered child wrapped in a shroud pursued and harassed a postman and his wife at West Auckland, County Durham. The child had been poisoned by his evil stepmother Mary Ann Cotton (1832-1873), hanged for his murder and that of three other children and her fourth





**LEFT:** Bar staff are shocked by an exploding Guinness glass at the Longs Arms pub in Wiltshire. **BELOW LEFT:** Elliot O'Donnell told a number of stories involving ghostly children

only once to Catherine Halls, the wife of Derek Page, MP, at Hannath Hall, Cambridgeshire, in a haunting over 1957-1959 (see *Poltergeists* (1979) by Alan Gauld and Anthony Cornell). An earlier example comes from Texas in 1881, reported in the *Journal of American Folklore* in 1951.

Just recently, in December 2021, another has turned up at South Wraxall near Bradford-on-Avon, Wiltshire, where husband and wife Rob and Liz Allcock report poltergeist tricks at the Longs Arms pub. Curious object movements have occurred and the couple rather accepted them as a matter of course at the pub which dates from 1870, though the building itself may be 16<sup>th</sup> century. Rob states: "Normally, you see things and then you look back and there's no one there. I'll be walking through to the kitchen, which has a door that opens both ways, and it will open as if someone is on the other side, pulling it – you get used to things like that." What particularly caught attention was a glass spontaneously bursting in an incident recorded on camera (for the video see *Wiltshire Live* <https://www.wiltshirelive.co.uk/news/wiltshire-news/watch-moment-glass-spontaneously-shatters-6322957>)

Interestingly, there have been scenarios in which a mysterious child sits down with customers while they are dining. Liz recalls instances where a customer goes to leave, and "they'd say to Rob: 'Wasn't that little boy really well behaved?' And he'd explain there was just two adults sitting there – there were no children." ("Moment Glass spontaneously shatters in haunted Wiltshire Pub", *Wiltshire Live*, 9 Dec 2021).

Fortunately, most child apparitions appear harmless, and may even engender joyful feelings in witnesses. A remarkable example which ghost hunter Andrew Green (1927-2004) never solved was a series of repeated sightings of a little girl with a wonderful smile seen in the town centre at Battle, Sussex, during the 1980s at three different locations, all aligned in close proximity and leading him to dub the area 'the Battle Triangle'. Each witness felt strong feelings of love and warmth radiating from the figure, generating a wish to pick up the little girl up and hug her if they could. Despite living locally and making extensive enquiries, Green never identified who this happy child might once have been. (**FT67:47, 342:30-35**; Andrew Green, lecture at Pyke House, Battle, Sussex, 8 Sept 1996, and his *Haunted Sussex Today*, 1997).

husband in March 1873. Cotton was also suspected of poisoning her mother, two other husbands, and other children and stepchildren. The ghost was laid by a local wise woman.

Another O'Donnell story features a malevolent ghostly girl in a bonnet, who appeared over successive nights in 1910 by the bedside of a seriously ill woman patient who was guilty of some undisclosed sin towards her. The form haunted the sick woman until she expired. This ghost, supposedly witnessed by a nurse, features in O'Donnell's posthumous collection *A Casebook of Ghosts* (1969), edited by Harry Ludlam – and has the hallmarks of recycled fiction. O'Donnell himself suffered a disrupted childhood, growing up in the aftermath of a family fractured by the murder of his clergyman father by persons unknown in Abyssinia in 1873. Perhaps his obsessions with ghosts, murder and mysteries and his lifelong experiences of entity encounters were influenced by this filial loss during his formative years.

A more recent story of a menacing ghostly girl who allegedly followed ghost-hunters home after a vigil at Berry Pomeroy Castle in 1983 is mentioned in Peter Underwood's *Nights in Haunted Houses* (1994), but corroborating details are scant. Underwood himself states he withdrew from the same vigil earlier in the evening because of the unscientific and uninhibited way the group were carrying on at the castle. If accurately recalled, overtiredness, auto-suggestion, delayed fright and fantasy may have all added to the alleged perceptions.

Perhaps more convincing – though difficult to fit into any parapsychological paradigm – are one-off appearances of ghostly boys disclosed from close scrutiny of poltergeist outbreaks. I drew attention to this pattern in my own contribution on 'high strangeness' poltergeists for *Deep Weird: The Varieties of High Strangeness*



## He averred the ghost of a murdered child wrapped in a shroud pursued and harassed a postman

*Experience* (2023) edited by Jack Hunter. Such a connection was hypothesised by Serena Roney Dougal on the basis of a single reported case in *The Faery Faith: An Integration of Science with Spirit* (1991), based on the Cardiff poltergeist of 1988-89. There, a ghostly schoolboy manifested just once in a garage afflicted by poltergeist activity. I have since found others. For instance, in 1977 poltergeist phenomena flared up inside a butcher's shop and flat at Torbay, Devon. A witness, Mrs Jacqueline Harding, saw "a boy aged about 12 and dressed in a sailor suit" who vanished into thin air as she watched. This figure appeared only once. ("Hubby quits home over a spook", *Sunday Mirror*, 22 May 1977.)

Likewise a phantom boy appeared





## STRANGE CONTINENT | ULRICH MAGIN rounds up the weird news from Europe's forests, lakes, streets and skies...

### COSMIC DEBRIS

When a couple from Elmshorn in northern Germany heard a loud bang on 25 April, they knew not what to make of it. Then they found their roof smashed and a strange stone on their lawn. They assumed it was a meteorite and alerted the fire service, who checked for radiation but could detect none ("all meteorites are radioactive", adds my source). Then, six further stones were found in the driveway of a neighbour. Experts from the German Centre for Air and Space navigation (Deutsches Zentrum für Luft- und Raumfahrt, DLR) were called in, searched for a whole weekend, and found 13 additional fragments, one weighing 3.5kg (7.7lb), one flat and one as large as a tennis ball. All fragments collected resulted in 6kg (13lb) of cosmic debris, which will be analysed in a lab in Dresden. Well-known German meteorite expert Dieter Heinlein spoke of "a sensation". It was suggested the stone had originally weighed one ton before it entered the atmosphere. [www.ndr.de](http://www.ndr.de), 2 May 2023.

### STRANGE NATURAL PHENOMENA

Storms and unusually severe atmospheric conditions were reported from several German cities. In Cologne on 12 April at about 11.15pm, a lightning bolt hit the ground near the port at Niehl and was measured at 212,000 amperes – an amount of electric current that only one per cent of lightning strikes attain. There has only once ever been a higher current in Germany: 685,000 amperes, registered in Baden-Württemberg in 2018. The loud bang when the flash hit the ground was heard all over northern Cologne, as a friend of mine can testify. [www.ksta.de](http://www.ksta.de), 13 April 2023.



On 29 April 2023, a thunderstorm hit Mainz, southern Germany, causing much damage: 25 buildings were hit by high winds and large hailstones up to 3cm (1in) in diameter. [web.de](http://web.de), 29 April 2023.

Meanwhile, the citizens of Duisburg in Germany were in panic because the walls of their homes had been shaking "for weeks" without any solution being found. [www.waz.de](http://www.waz.de), 8 Mar 2023.

Then, on 20 April on the North Sea island of Baltrum, a hiker came across "an unidentified substance... a 'sticky black mass' while out in the dunes at the east end of the island and close to a footpath. He alerted firefighters, who went out to investigate and excavated some three square metres of sand to expose the mass. As Alexander Gutbier-Wach, the community fire chief,

### Large black shapes emerge from the depths and move left

explained, the material could not be identified. He could only say for sure that the sticky stuff posed no danger for the population and could well be a form of bitumen, as used in road construction. The next day, experts from the mainland arrived, including firefighters trained to dealing with ABC weapons (atomic, biological and chemical), and took samples. The first press reports said results were expected within the next few days, but later press accounts still talk of an unidentified substance – "Is it atomic or animal?", asked one

TOP LEFT: The meteorite that crashed on an Elmshorn lawn. BELOW LEFT: Video of the Lake Iseo 'monster'.

paper mysteriously – before the whole story faded from the media. [www.t-online.de](http://www.t-online.de), 22 April; [www.nwzonline.de](http://www.nwzonline.de), 24 April 2023.

### WATER MONSTERS

The northern Italian lakes, while no real match for Scotland's Loch Ness, still produce a steady stream of monster sightings that, in some years, almost rival the numbers of their more famous northern cousin. The River Adda flows out of Lake Como and empties into the Po, but just kilometres south of the lake it passes Brivio. In August 2022, rumours started in the city that a crocodile had been spotted near a bridge where the river forms a swamp, "a sort of Everglades outside of Florida, the perfect habitat for alligators." As a newspaper report states, "in recent days a crocodile has been spotted swimming sinuously on the surface of the water: only the head and eyes and part of the tail have emerged from the surface." When the animal came ashore, bathers allegedly screamed and the reptile sank back into the river once more. Nobody ever met any of the alleged eyewitnesses, but within hours everybody knew what had happened. However, no reports were made to the local or provincial police or the carabinieri. "The fishermen who work the river also swear that they know nothing and that they have not seen any crocodiles, which would hardly go unnoticed as the Adda is dry due to the drought, said *Il Giornio*, and the paper suggested "an urban legend, a turtle or a large catfish" as a possible explanation for the sighting; which, after all, may never have happened anyway. [ilgiorno.it](http://ilgiorno.it), 30 Aug 2022.



More substantial was the monster of Lake Iseo, which was filmed in February 2023. At 5.30pm on Friday 17 February, with the waters of the lake smooth as a mirror, waves suddenly appeared before large black humps broke the surface off Tavernola, on the lake's west bank. Pensioner Narciso Ravelli grabbed his phone and shot two minutes of film that show a remarkable phenomenon: large black shapes emerge from the depths and move to the left, looking for all the world like playful porpoises; then the objects become larger and reveal themselves to be bubbles of gas or air that burst as they reach the lake's surface. Most of the comments on social media expressed shock, and speculation was that that the images showed a school of lake monsters – or perhaps catfish, the explanation favoured by Ravelli himself, who said: "With my mobile phone, I filmed what was happening on the stretch of water close to the Stress Café, formerly Bar Roma. I couldn't believe my eyes, but what I have seen and filmed were huge fish that were migrating on the lake."

When I saw the images, I thought the bubbles might have been caused by a group of scuba divers, while Swiss monster expert Andrea Trottmann suggested the possibility that it was gas escaping from a pipe on the lake bottom or from a wreck. I was unable to confirm any wreck at the site, but since early 2022 there have been fears around Tavernola of a large impending landslide, which might in its slow progress also release trapped air below the shoreline. After heavy rainfall in September 2022, a country road near Tavernola was left split open by wide clefts, and on 12 February 2023, the inhabitants of Predore and Clusane, south of Tavernola, heard a loud bang at 10.30am. It was caused by a large landslide that displaced 66 cubic metres of rock from



ABOVE: The terrifying streetlight on Wrocław's Sienkiewicz Street.

the hills on the western banks of the lake. *primabergamo.it*, 8 Sept 2022, 13+18 Feb 2023; *ecodibergamo.it*, 18 Feb 2023.

## ALIEN CARNIVORES

Some phenomena have their seasons, which don't always coincide with the hot summer months. I always search papers in several languages with the same keywords, and sometimes I am showered with big cat reports, and sometimes there is not a single sighting. I have had a dearth of ABC reports for some issues, and when I read in December 2022 that a "forest ghost", some kind of strange cat, had been spotted and photographed at Nocera Umbra, near Perugia in Italy, I thought the big cats had finally returned. What Massimiliano Squadroni had photographed with a camera trap in the local woods was a wild cat, *Felis silvestris*, confirming the return of the species to central Italy. *perugiatoday.it*, 24 Dec 2022.

A big cat, assumed to be a lion, has been roaming Prouvy in northern France near the

Belgian border. Mayor Isabelle Choain told the press that "a resident of Prouvy who lives near the train tracks called the town hall on Monday [27 Feb]. He saw an animal and even sent us a video: It wasn't a cat, it wasn't a dog, and it wasn't a fox. The animal had the gait of a cat." The witness, who preferred to remain anonymous, said he had seen the animal three times in 10 days. Then he filmed it around 3.20pm near the rail tracks. He reported an additional encounter the following day around 10am. The animal always strolls "with a calm step," he said. "We have never seen it aggressive. My daughter and I think it is a lion cub. Its tail is impressive." Alerted by town officials, the French Biodiversity Agency investigated the site where the animal had been seen and found that "hunters and railway workers regularly frequent the wooded areas, as well as the adjacent fields." They plan to analyse the witness's video. *La Voix du Nord*, 28 Feb 2023; *netzwerk-kryptozoologie.de*.

Meanwhile in Romania, at the eastern borders of Europe, farmer Vasile Staicu is angry. He has lost 25 calves to golden jackals this year, and 40 last year. Staicu owns 500 cattle at Maliuc in the delta of the Danube. In the last few years, the jackal, a sort of wild dog smaller than a wolf, has been spreading rapidly throughout Europe – about 29,000 animals are thought to inhabit Romania, with another 90,000 in the bordering countries. It is believed they entered Romania in the 1960s from Bulgaria to the south and from the Caucasus via a northern route. Mihai Marinov, a biologist from the Institute for Danube Delta Research in Tulcea, believes the jackals have been able to settle as the temperatures rise due to climate change.

Farmers fear for their herds, and ecologist Ovidiu Banea points out that the spread of the carnivores is helped by the Romanian custom of keeping cattle, sheep and chicken unfenced around the villages. Marinov, however, blames the farmer's habit of throwing dead animals, such as cats, chicken and pigs, on heaps just outside the villages, where they are left to rot and attract the jackals. Viorel Rosca, director of the Macin Mountains National Park, has another theory: he thinks that as wolves were exterminated during the communist regime, jackals began to move in to occupy their ecological niche. Meanwhile, the animals have now reached Germany and all countries between the Black Sea and central Europe. *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*, 28 April 2023.

## POLISH SPOOK

A street light caused a short-lived Internet sensation in Poland when images of it appeared on social media. The light, on Sienkiewicz Street in Wrocław, is covered by wild vine, and so lost much of its brightness, at the same time producing a ghoulish image, a fine example of pareidolia. *polejournal.de*, 13 Jan 2023.



## PET TREKS

Another round-up of errant animals, from the Herne Bay cat who hitched multiple lifts to get to London to the Australian Shepherd who crossed the frozen Bering Sea

## COOPER'S ODYSSEY

After his original owners handed him in to an animal rescue charity, Cooper the Golden Retriever was adopted by Nigel Fleming, a photographer from Dungannon in County Tyrone, Northern Ireland, as a companion for his other dog, Molly. However, Cooper's transition to this new life was not smooth. "I was just about to get the dogs out of the car on their leads for their first walk together when Cooper bolted. He literally jumped over Molly, prised the car door open enough to get past me and ran for it," Fleming said. "It was a disaster. The poor boy had no idea where he was... I tried to chase after him but he was gone in an instant – so then the search was on."

Fleming could not find Cooper anywhere, so he enlisted the help of pet-finding charity Lost Paws Northern Ireland. They helped organise day and night searches while locals also used drones to film the area to try and track Cooper's route, all without success. Eventually, 27 days later, Lost Paws said: "We received a call from a member of the public stating that he recognised Cooper from our posts and that he had seen him running towards his old property." He had found his way back to Tobermore, County Londonderry, where he lived in the past with his brother George, 25 miles (40km) as the crow flies from where he had disappeared. They contacted Fleming, sending him a photo of the dog, dishevelled but alive; he had lost weight but was otherwise healthy.

Fleming said that he was a "very happy and relieved man" to be reunited with Cooper, who, Lost Paws estimated, had travelled a total of 40 miles (64km) to return to his old home. "It seems incredible that he was able to do this. But dogs are incredible and that's why we work so hard to help them every day," a Lost Paws spokesman said, adding, "Cooper



crossed main A roads, forests, fields, country roads all to make his way back to his old home from an area he'd never been in before. Cooper is a clever boy. Instinct took him back to a place he was familiar with. How he did it I'll never know but he managed it". *D.Telegraph*, 30 Apr 2023.

LEFT: Golden Retriever Cooper, who made a 40-mile trip from Dungannon to his old home in Tobermore. BELOW LEFT: A map showing the route of Cooper's epic journey. BELOW RIGHT: Australian Shepherd dog Nanuq, who appears to have trekked across the frozen Bering Sea on his icy odyssey.

they failed to return after that, she became worried. Two and a half weeks after vanishing, Starlight turned up in Savoonga, a town 37 miles (60km) away along the coast of St Lawrence Island, but Nanuq was not with him. However, a month later a strange dog showed up in the small village of Wales, 166 miles (267km) away on the coast of the Alaskan mainland. No one could figure out who its owner was, but it had a collar and tag. Iworrihan's father heard of this and texted her saying, "There's a dog that looks like Nanuq in Wales," and Iworrihan replied, "No freaking way, that's our dog!" Nanuq had trekked right across the Bering Sea ice to get to Wales, taking at least a week, assuming he had continued on after leaving Starlight in Savoonga. Iworrihan is not sure how he survived the trek, but thinks he may have hunted small animals. "I was just amazed he made it all the way out there," she said. "He's a survivor." Nanuq had bite marks on his leg, which she thinks might have been the result of a confrontation with a wolverine, seal, or small polar bear, but was otherwise healthy. After using air miles to have Nanuq flown home, Iworrihan said: "I just knew, you know, in my heart that they were alive. Dogs are smart." *insider.com*, 13 Apr 2023.



## NANUQ OF THE NORTH

In Alaska, Nanuq, a one-year-old Australian Shepherd dog, went missing from his home on St Lawrence Island, along with another of the family dogs, Starlight. Their owner, Mandy Iworrihan, was used to the dogs roaming the tundra for a week or two at a time, but when

## COCCI COME HOME

Laetitia De Amicis, 41, moved from Ambly-Sur-Meuse in northeast France to Giani in Normandy in 2021. However, almost as soon as she arrived her beloved cat Cocco went missing and, despite extensive searching, could not be found. No one reported any sightings





until 13 months later, when a couple found an emaciated cat hiding under a car and posted its picture on the missing animal website Pet Alert. De Amicis, who had never given up hope of finding Cocci, was almost certain it was her but was amazed by where she was; Cocci had travelled more than 280 miles (450km) and had been found less than 10 miles from her old home in Ambly-Sur-Meuse. She sent her father to positively identify the cat and when he called to confirm it was Cocci she burst into tears. "I still can't believe it," she said. *D.Mirror*, 12 Nov 2022.

## SOX APPEAL

Jessica Roe from Herne Bay in Kent had got used to collecting her ginger and white cat Sox from unusual locations including schools, offices, a swimming pool, an Amazon delivery truck, a nightclub and a kebab shop. There is a Facebook page for his adventures, and his exploits once saw him appear on the local community Facebook page eight times in a single week. However, Sox excelled himself by making a 140-mile (225km) round trip to Wallington in south London, using two cars to get there.

He started by jumping in a car that took him to nearby Whitstable, where the car owner found him and took him to a vet. They contacted Roe, who jokingly said, "Oh God, as long as he doesn't get on the train to London, we'll be okay". Before they could be reunited, though, he gave the vet the slip and ran off. Sox was next spotted by Jacqui O'Connor who was returning home to Wallington after a day out in Whitstable. "We were driving down the motorway, singing along as you do on the drive home, chatting away, and all of a sudden this head pops up between the two chairs," she said. She, too, identified Sox and contacted his owner, and a follower of the cat's Facebook page, who was returning from Stonehenge, retrieved him and took him back to Herne Bay. "We were so happy to have him back home again, I let the boys stay awake



to see him because they were so excited, said Ms Roe. "I've tried to ground him, but he's already tried to get in the car when we were heading to the beach and I've heard that he's been visiting the school today." *kentonline*, 14 Jun; *BBC News*, 15 Jun 2023.

## CAT ON THE EDGE

Alerted by a friend, Jo Bobbie set out to rescue a cat that had apparently been stuck on a narrow ledge at one of the entrances to the Plymouth

University Roland Levinsky building for more than three hours. She called the RSPCA and the fire service, but neither could send anyone unless 24 hours had elapsed, while the university estate team didn't have the right kind of ladder. Biba Hawkins, who was also concerned about the cat, realised that window cleaners have all kinds of ladders so called AG's Reach and Wash Window Cleaning Services, who arrived within half an hour and

LEFT: Sox – whose wanderings have seen him rescued from a swimming pool, an Amazon van and a nightclub – outdid himself with a trip to London. BELOW LEFT: Cocci, reunited with her owner after 13 months and a 280-mile journey.

easily retrieved the stranded animal. "I must admit, it baffled me how it got there," said company owner Aaron Griffiths. Bobbie took the cat to the vets, who checked its microchip and said: "You're not going to believe it – it's from Ipswich." The cat turned out to have made the 325-mile (523km) journey in a car bringing a student to the university. "It's an indoor cat so the poor thing must have been absolutely terrified, which is why it was frozen to the ledge and wouldn't move. Thankfully, the owners collected it later the same day, so it all ended well," said Bobbie. *plymoutherald.co.uk*, 25 Apr 2023.

## COLLIE CRASH

Less successful in her attempt to light out for the territory was border collie Freya. Left in the family car, she managed to knock the automatic gearbox into drive, sending the car rolling down a hill, where Shaun Waller, 34, hearing a bang, went outside to find that the Jeep Cherokee with Freya at the wheel had collided with his parked car. Fortunately, Waller was not concerned about the damage and found the incident hilarious, while Freya's owner Sue Brewer, 60, said the dog was "absolutely fine" after the crash, but would be banished to the boot in future. *D.Mail*, 19 Dec 2022.

## ROSIE'S RETURN

Spooked by fireworks, 10-year-old border collie Rosie fled from her owner Steve Harper, who feared he would never see her again. However, shortly afterwards, Rosie walked into Loughborough police station, half a mile (0.8km) away and settled down in the foyer. After checking the tag on her collar, police were able to call Harper and tell him Rosie had handed herself in so he could come and collect her. *D.Mail*, 16 Nov 2022.



## MEDICAL BAG

This month's casebook of curiosities includes a rare case of an unborn twin lodged in a child's brain and a pair of highly unusual infections

### TWO IN ONE

Doctors at Fudan University, Shanghai, treating a one-year-old girl who had an enlarged head and problems with her motor skills, gave her a CT scan. This showed that her brain was compressed and that there was a significant build-up of fluid caused by a large growth within one of her brain's ventricles. Further examination showed that the growth was the foetus of the child's unborn twin that had developed within her brain. The "fetiform mass" was only partially developed, but had grown upper limbs, including finger-like projections, and was removed by the doctors. Known as foetus-in-fetu, these cases come about when, early in a twin pregnancy, the cluster of dividing cells fails to separate properly, so that one of the early embryos becomes enveloped by the other. The enclosed foetus does not go on to fully develop, but remains "alive", nourished by the larger twin's blood supply. Foetus-in-fetu is extremely rare; it is estimated to occur only once in every 500,000 births and only 200 cases have been recorded since the first one was described in the *British Medical Journal* in 1808. Finding a case where the foetus is embedded in the brain is even rarer, with only 18 on record, the most recent being reported from Thailand in 2017, where doctors found three foetuses inside the skull of an unborn girl, each with "multiple well-developed organs", including a nervous, digestive and respiratory system.

Another foetus-in-fetu case was discovered in Ranchi, Jharkhand state, India, in October last year, when a 21-week-old girl was being examined by doctors to find out why her abdomen was swollen. According to the medics, this was a result of her having absorbed eight other embryos in the womb, which had then gone on to grow in her abdomen, although it is not clear exactly how developed these embryos were. The girl had the extra embryos removed in a 90-minute



**TOP:** The fetiform mass removed by doctors from a one-year-old girl's brain, with upper limb and finger-like buds. **ABOVE:** Six touring mummies from the Museo de las Momias de Guanajuato apparently show worrying signs of fungal growth.

operation, and it is thought that this was the largest number of embedded embryos ever found in a foetus-in-fetu case. *iflscience.com*, 7 Mar; *indianexpress.com*, 11 Mar 2023; *dailymail.co.uk*, 4 Nov 2022+8 Mar 2023.

### MEDICAL SECRET

A prayer known as "The Secret" that is supposed to protect patients from excessive bleeding is still in regular use in hospitals in French-speaking parts of Switzerland. Dating back to the Middle Ages, it is meant to invoke "superior forces to help cure the patient". Authority for its efficacy comes from the biblical story of "Jesus healing the bleeding woman" and a

recent study has been carried out by medical researchers into the use and effectiveness of the charm. They found that 76 per cent of patients going into surgery in areas where the charm is still popular asked that their doctors performed The Secret before the operation. In the study, researchers compared the outcomes for 200 patients undergoing heart surgery in Switzerland; half received the standard medical care for such cases and half received standard care plus The Secret. The researchers could find no significant difference in bleeding between the two groups, measured using the Bleeding Academic Research Consortium

(BARC) scale. As a result, they concluded that The Secret was "of no relevance in cardiology" but acknowledged that the prayer might "limit the anxiety of superstitious believers, allow some neuropsychological conditioning, and act as a placebo". However, The Secret has been recognised by UNESCO as part of the "intangible heritage" of Switzerland and remains unusual in that while similar charms are used elsewhere, they are not usually officially in use by doctors. *odittycentral.com*, 28 Dec 2022.

### MUMMIES' REVENGE

A long-standing display of naturally mummified human remains in Mexico City has been raising health concerns for visitors to the museum where the mummies are on show. The mummies, which have toured the US in the past and recently appeared at a Mexico City tourism fair, are showing signs of fungal growth on their surfaces, which is causing Mexico's National Institute of Anthropology and History to raise concerns about possible danger to visitors, as well as the way that the mummies are being managed and cared for. The six mummies are in display cases, but no one is sure how airtight these are. "It is even more worrisome that they are still being exhibited without the safeguards for the public against biohazards," the Institute said in a statement. "From some of the published photos, at least one of the corpses on display, which was inspected by the Institute in November 2021, shows signs of a proliferation of possible fungus colonies." As the mummies were not embalmed, but naturally preserved, they are particularly sensitive to environmental change that could restart decay, and the fungus seems to be an indication that this is happening. While deadly infection from mummy fungus is not common, it has been cited as one of the possible causes of the alleged "Curse of Tutankhamun" and 10

of the 12 scientists present at the 1970 opening of King Casimir IV's tomb in Poland died within weeks, it is believed from fungal infections caught at the event. [popularmechanics.com](http://popularmechanics.com), 3 Apr 2023.

### IGUANA SURPRISE

When the parents of four-year-old Lena Mars from California took her to the doctors for a persistent lump growing on her finger, their holiday in Costa Rica five months previously was probably not uppermost in their mind. Doctors checked the lump, decided it was probably a harmless cyst and left it alone.

It continued to grow, though, and began to cause pain, so the medics decided to take a biopsy. When the test came back, the results were surprising: it seems that Lena was harbouring an infection of *Mycobacterium marinum*, a bacterium that causes a tuberculosis-like disease in fish but is exceedingly rare in humans.

Mostly, humans are infected by exposure in water, but this just produces a surface rash, not a growth. However, thinking back to the family holiday, Lena's parents remembered an incident where they had given their daughter a cake as a snack when she was sitting on a terrace, and one of the local iguanas had sneaked up, bitten her hand and made off with the cake. Local medics had checked the bite and given the child antibiotics, and the wound seemed to heal without problems, only manifesting as a lump months later. Dr Jordan Mah, who worked on the case, said the girl's parents probably weren't thinking about the bite when they took her to a doctor because of the bump on her hand. "I think when they went to get medical attention for the bump initially, the bite kind of slipped their mind because they didn't see it as a potential exposure, because it just healed. And it was only later on during the course of treatment, as it got worse, that it kind of jogged their memory and

they brought it to the doctor's attention." He believes that Mars's case is the first on record of a *Mycobacterium marinum* infection caused by an iguana bite. [editions.cnn.com](http://editions.cnn.com), 2 April 2023.

### FUNGAL FIGHTBACK

A rather more threatening unique infection was suffered by a 61-year-old Indian mycologist who visited a medical centre in the east of the country with a cough and hoarse voice, fatigue, and difficulty swallowing. He was given a CT scan and an X-ray that revealed a pus-filled abscess in his neck, next to his trachea. Tests failed to identify any bacteria, but turned up traces of fungal hyphae, their long root-like filaments. These, however, did not resemble those of most fungi that cause infections, so the organism

had to be identified by its DNA, using a World Health Organisation database. This revealed that the offending organism was *Chondrostereum purpureum*, or silver leaf disease, a common fungus

that attacks a wide range of plants from pears to roses and rhododendrons, infecting their branches and becoming swiftly lethal to the plant unless treated, but it had never previously been found infecting humans and had made a huge interspecies leap to do so. While, as a mycologist, the victim worked continually with fungi, he had not worked directly with *C. purpureum*, but believes he may have come into contact with it during fieldwork. As he seems to have had a fully functioning immune system, with no indication of being on immunosuppressant drugs, having HIV, diabetes, or any kind of chronic illness, the ability of the fungus to take hold has concerned medics. "Cross-kingdom human pathogens, and their potential plant reservoirs, have important implications for the emergence of infectious diseases," said the authors of the paper reporting on this case. [sciencealert.com](http://sciencealert.com), 3 Apr 2023.



# MYTHCONCEPTIONS

by Mat Coward

## 270: ULCERS



ILLUSTRATIONS BY HUNT EMERSON

### The myth

Stomach ulcers are caused by stress, too much booze, too many fags, too much spicy or acidic food, worry and anxiety.

### The "truth"

The belief that gastric ulcers were a price paid for the "executive's lifestyle" was unchallenged until the 1980s, when two Australian doctors, Barry Marshall and Robin Warren, began to research the role of a bacillus named *Helicobacter pylori*. They went on to win the Nobel Prize for medicine, and now it's universally accepted that the vast majority of stomach ulcers are caused by *H. pylori*, with the rest accounted for by prescription drugs, but at the time they were met with a stonewall of scepticism. Their 1983 paper to the Gastroenterological Society of Australia was turned down by reviewers. In an act of self-experimentation that has entered fortan folklore, Marshall then deliberately infected his own gut with *H. pylori*. Before and during the experiment he underwent a series of biopsies and endoscopies, while recording his symptoms – vomiting, nausea, bad breath, and so on. The results were published in 1985, and the wall began to slowly crumble. Today, almost all stomach ulcers are simply and quickly treated with antibiotics, instead of bland diets or radical surgery, as Marshall always predicted.

### Sources

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/stomach-ulcer/causes](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stomach-ulcer/causes); [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1283743](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1283743); [www.discovermagazine.com/health/the-doctor-who-drank-infectious-broth-gave-himself-an-ulcer-and-solved-a-medical-mystery](http://www.discovermagazine.com/health/the-doctor-who-drank-infectious-broth-gave-himself-an-ulcer-and-solved-a-medical-mystery)

### Disclaimer

Medical consensuses can make more changes than a supermodel on a catwalk; let us know if any of the above gives you a bellyache.

### Mythchaser

You don't need to hold your nose when you're walking through a sewer, says a retired sewer worker, because the ambient smell of a properly maintained tunnel is entirely inoffensive. Sewers don't pong, unless something's gone wrong.





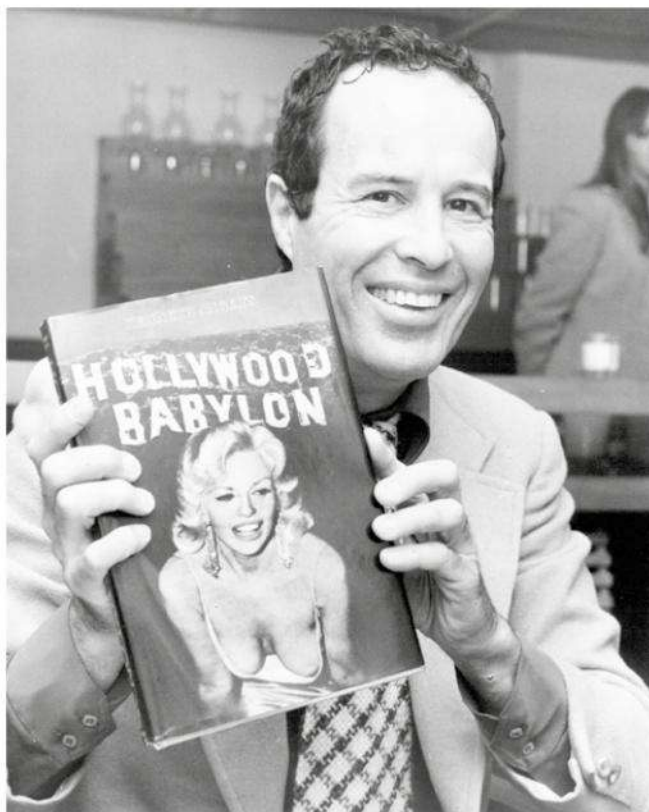
## NECROLOG

This month, we wave off experimental filmmaker, occultist and Hollywood gossip merchant Kenneth Anger as he goes to the great magic lantern show in the sky

### KENNETH ANGER

Kenneth Anger, who has died aged 96, was a countercultural polymath, who, while never achieving widespread public recognition, was a significant influence on many who did. He was primarily an experimental filmmaker, but also an occultist and a celebrated purveyor of Hollywood gossip. Anger's reputation is based on a succession of extraordinary, sensuous short films, starting in the late 1940s with *Fireworks*. He was influenced by Maya Deren, Eisenstein, and the surrealists, but more significantly by Hollywood Technicolor epics and silent film, particularly the Lumière brothers, Georges Méliès, and Douglas Sirk. Indeed, he claims to have made his first film appearance back in the classic era of Hollywood, as a child playing the Changeling Prince in the 1935 Warner Brothers film *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, although this is disputed, with Warner Brothers' records saying the role was played by a girl named Sheila Brown. Anger's biographer Bill Landis, however, says: "Anger as a child; visually, he's immediately recognizable." His claim to have been a dance partner of Shirley Temple at the Santa Monica Cotillion in his teens does seem to rest on firmer ground, though.

Anger is probably best known in popular culture for his book *Hollywood Babylon*, which he wrote during the late 1950s, rather than his films. It is deliciously salacious, tasteless, and indiscreet, and claims to tell the truth about the dark underbelly of Hollywood, from Fatty Arbuckle's disgrace to Jayne Mansfield's grisly death. Lawsuits, though, meant that it was not published in the US until 1975. The tales Anger told were allegedly gossip he'd heard in Hollywood, with no sources cited, and subsequently almost everything in the book, and its



LEFT: Kenneth Anger in 1979 with a copy of *Hollywood Babylon*.

sequel written in the 1980s, has been demonstrated to be inaccurate, if not a complete fabrication. There is, apparently, a third volume of *Hollywood Babylon*, completed sometime in the 1990s or early 2000s, but this has never seen the light of day. This seems to be because it attracted the attention of the Church of Scientology's fearsome lawyers, whom even Anger hesitated to cross, saying: "The main reason I didn't bring it out was that I had a whole section on Tom Cruise and the Scientologists. I'm not a friend of the Scientologists." However, *Hollywood Babylon: It's Back!* written by Darwin Porter and Danforth Prince appeared in 2008, without Anger's involvement and much to his annoyance, resulting in him placing a curse on the authors.

Anger's films (see FT231:51-52) are heavily symbolic, jewel-like indulgences, almost

all with a musical soundtrack instead of dialogue. This varies from Janacek's *Glagolitic Mass*, against which his *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* unfolds, to the early 1960s pop hits that soundtrack *Scorpio Rising* and *Kustom Kar Kommandoes*, two films that prefigured the rock video. Above all, though, the abiding themes of his films were homosexuality and the occult. An out gay man from an early age, at a time when homosexuality was still illegal in the US, he made explicitly gay themed films right from the start. *Fireworks*, which Anger claimed to have made at 17 (in fact, he was 20), is a homoerotic dream about being raped by sailors, which was prosecuted for obscenity when first shown, although the California Supreme Court had the good sense to acquit Anger on the grounds that the film was art. *Fireworks* also led to him being

contacted by the sexologist Alfred Kinsey, in whose research Anger participated, being filmed masturbating for one of his reports, with the two remaining friends until Kinsey's death. It also attracted the attention of Jean Cocteau, on whose invitation he moved to France, where he attempted to film Cocteau's ballet *The Young Man and Death*, although this fell through due to lack of funding – a problem that was to dog Anger throughout his career. While living in France he did, though, make *Rabbit's Moon* and *Eaux D'Artifice*. This was a sensual black and white meditation on the fountains in the Tivoli Gardens in Rome, a fragment of an intended longer film, and is probably Anger's most serene work.

Anger's interest in the occult began at an early age. "I was raised a Presbyterian, but rejected Christianity at the age of eight, when my parents tried to make me go to Sunday school. It was not an ideological position; I just wanted to read the Sunday funny papers," he said. Initially stimulated by reading the *Wizard of Oz* books and discovering the Rosicrucian philosophies of Frank L Baum that lay behind them, he soon moved on to reading Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* and the works of Eliphas Levi. However, it was in Aleister Crowley's Thelema that he found his true calling, after being tutored in his work by a friend, Marjorie Cameron. Cameron had been married to rocket pioneer and Crowley acolyte Jack Parsons (see FT132:34-38), acting as his "Scarlet Woman" in Thelemite rituals, and is a prominent and imperious presence in Anger's 1954 film *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome*. This also features the erotic writer



Anaïs Nin, whom Anger had met in France. Anger went on to join the OTO and from *Pleasure Dome* onwards occult imagery suffuses all his films. Anger's best-known film, 1964's *Scorpio Rising*, combines occult undertones with a lingering appreciation of the physiques of a gang of gay/Nazi bikers as they work on their machines, party and race, and features both the most surprising use of mustard in modern cinema as well as the most outrageously suggestive traffic cone. At its debut showing at the Gramercy Arts Theater in New York, there were queues round the block to see it, but the explicitly gay content earned the cinema owner a conviction for obscenity, and Anger was sued by both the Lutheran Church for copyright violation (his inclusion of clips from their films was deemed fair use) and the American Nazi Party for desecration of their flag (they lost).

These films, along with most of the others he made between 1947 and 1981, have become known as the *Magick Lantern Cycle* and are a potent brew of gay and occult imagery. His magickal beliefs are most prominent in *Pleasure Dome* and two films made in the late 1960s, when he was living in London and close to the Rolling Stones, *Invocation of My Demon Brother* and *Lucifer Rising*. Mick Jagger soundtracked *Invocation*, while Marianne Faithfull played Lilith in *Lucifer Rising*, with *Performance* co-director Donald Cammell as Osiris. The latter film had a difficult gestation, not least because its original star Bobby Beausoleil had stolen the earlier 1966 version of the film and buried it in the Mojave Desert. Beausoleil was also composing the soundtrack, but his work was interrupted when he was imprisoned as one of Charles Manson's acolytes, having been implicated in the murder of Gary Hinman by the group. The soundtrack was then taken on in London by Jimmy Page, whose interest in Crowley was strongly influenced by



TOP: Thelemite rituals and jewel-like colours in *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome*. ABOVE: Anger working on *Lucifer Rising* in London, 1971.

Anger, but the two fell out. Anger then reverted to the Beausoleil soundtrack after he was allowed to complete it in prison, where he remains to this day. It was during this London period that actor and forerunner Ken Campbell encountered Anger and was invited to his

flat, where Anger opened the door to him clad in a robe made entirely of razor blades. After *Lucifer* was finally completed in 1981, Anger largely retired from film making until 2000, when he started making lower key, less overtly occult films, such as *Mouse Heaven*, featuring

a friend's collection of Mickey Mouse toys, and *Ich Will*, which recut archive film of Hitler Youth activities and backed it with a sombre soundtrack.

"Making a movie is like casting a spell," said Anger, and while his films have never had more than a limited circulation, their influence has been huge. Martin Scorsese is an avowed fan, and as well as his use of music, you can see traces of *Scorpio Rising* in the way he shot *Taxi Driver*. David Lynch, too, has spoken of the influence of Anger, which shows in his use of colour and music, as well as frequent visual quotes – for example Isabella Rossellini in *Blue Velvet* is the image of Yvonne Marquis in Anger's *Puce Moment*. Other filmmakers whose work owes a debt to Anger include John Waters, Derek Jarman and Nicolas Winding Refn; and, indeed, it could be said that both experimental and queer cinema as they exist today would not be the same without Kenneth Anger. Film critic David Kehr said that "Andy Warhol aside, Kenneth Anger may be the United States' best-known maker of experimental and avant-garde films... The missing link between Caravaggio and Bruce Weber."

His occult beliefs, too, have had far-reaching influence; his involvement with the Stones and Jimmy Page was a powerful influence on the nexus of magick and rock music and he forms a link between modern occult practitioners and those of Crowley's era like Parsons, whom he never met, but is linked to by Cameron. While the *Hollywood Babylon* volumes have turned out to be largely fabrications, what fabrications they are; Anger's books are an absolute vindication of the old saw "Never mind the truth, print the legend!" and remain classics.

**Kenneth Anger** (Kenneth Wilbur Anglemeyer), filmmaker, occultist and writer; born Santa Monica, California, 3 Feb 1927; died, Yucca Valley, California, 11 May 2023, aged 96.





# Full disclosure... by Christmas

As the latest whistleblower spills the ufological beans, **NIGEL WATSON** thinks we've been here before

**T**he revelation by David Charles Grusch that vehicles of non-human origin have been recovered by US intelligence agencies sent a ripple of excitement through the world of ufology.

The news came in an article posted on *The Debrief* website (5 June 2023) by Leslie Kean and Ralph Blumenthal. Grusch's credentials seem pretty impressive as he has worked for the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA) and the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO), and from 2021 to July 2022 he was a UAP analyst for the Unidentified Aerial Phenomena Task Force (UAPTF). He left government on 7 April 2023, after being threatened and intimidated for interviewing high-level intelligence officials who told him about the retrieval of these craft and programmes to reverse-engineer them.<sup>1</sup>

A typical response from Michael Mac on Facebook was: "By Christmas the entire world will understand just how real this is – what you are witnessing is an internal, decade long fight between the people/Congress, and the military/Government who have been lying the entire time."

Charles Denham noted: "They are starting to call David Charles Grusch this generation's Bob Lazar. The story and the background by the journalists seem genuine. Time will tell." Given the controversy surrounding Lazar (see below), that is hardly a ringing endorsement.

Pentagon spokesperson Susan Gough told Fox News: "To date, the AARO (All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office) has not discovered any verifiable information to substantiate claims that any programmes regarding the possession or reverse-engineering of extraterrestrial materials have existed in the past or exist currently."

The same line was given by Daniel Evans, assistant deputy associate administrator for research at NASA's Science Mission Directorate, at a UAP briefing held by NASA on 31 May 2023, who said that "there is absolutely no convincing evidence for extraterrestrial life associated with UAPs."

Some other red flags also quickly came to light. One was that Kean and Blumenthal had tried placing the story with the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, but dissatisfied with the delays in checking the story they instead gave it to *The Debrief*. They also refrained from mentioning the recovery of alien bodies and Grusch's wilder claims, which Kean says was never discussed with her and that she would not have published even had they come up. This



## Grusch said that the Vatican was aware of UFOs due to this crash and other sightings

odd form of censorship did not stop other media outlets, who were all too happy to repeat Grusch's allegations. For example, he told French newspaper *Le Parisien*: "In 1933, a bell-like craft, around 10m [33ft] in size, was recovered in Magenta, northern Italy. It was kept by Mussolini's government until 1944 when it was recovered by agents of the Office of Strategic Services."

Grusch told *NewsNation* that the Vatican was aware of UFOs due to this crash and numerous other sightings during Mussolini's dictatorship. Going full Louis Elizondo, he added: "I've seen some very interesting things that I'm not authorised to talk about publicly at the moment. I don't have the approval."

Yet he has gone on to claim that credible witnesses have reported seeing huge football-field-sized spacecraft and that the analysis of novel material could solve propulsion and energy issues: the fact that we haven't heard about this is down to a plot by the US Government to "prohibit progress".

Furthermore, the aliens are malevolent and not above killing people, "based on nuclear site probing activities and witness testimony". Likewise, the US Government is also willing to kill people in order to keep

secret the ET arms race with China and Russia.

"We know there are extra dimensions due to high-energy particle collisions, etc., and there's a theoretical framework to explain that. It could be that this is not necessarily extraterrestrial and actually that it's coming from a higher-dimensional physical space that might be co-located right here," Grusch speculates.

Not everyone has been impressed by such claims. Ralph Howard noted on Facebook: "Just reading all of it, it seems Mr Grusch is making a lot of statements about what other people know and have told him, which is all second- and third-hand. Folks, it's not enough."

Kevin Randle, on his *A Different Perspective* blog, was more open-minded, saying that "my research tends to validate some of what Grusch said. But we're in the same place without the documents or photographs of the debris that we have always found ourselves. I have talked with people who claimed insider status, but who are reluctant to go on the record, but talked of secret studies and investigations and recovered artifacts."

Sceptic Jason Colavito asserts that: "Grusch's claims seem to be nothing more than another version of the narrative that the team represented by Hal Puthoff, Eric W Davis, Luiz Elizondo, and the others who orbit the Skinwalker Ranch spook crew have been peddling – without evidence – for decades."<sup>2</sup>

Jan Aldrich on Facebook supported the idea that there is an 'in-crowd' of UFO promoters: "David Grusch got the Italian

crash story from his buddy Luis Elizondo. DeLonge and Elizondo on their trip to Italy ran into some of the few Italian ufologists who support the 1933 (ah, 1943) hoax. They went all in. Grusch did not get this incident from the US Government or the UAP Task Force. Elizondo from the beginning told people what he thought of history. However, when he does dip into history he does it without much checking.”

## A CONGRESS OF UFOs

A ‘Disclosure of Urgent Concern(s); Complaint of Reprisal on behalf of Grusch’ document was submitted by the Compass Rose Legal Group, dated 25 May 2022, to the Intelligence Community Inspector General. This states that in July 2021 he communicated UAP-related classified information to the Department of Defense Inspector General, and since then he has been intimidated and his information has been improperly withheld and concealed from the US Congress. Four days after publicly airing his claims, the Compass Rose Legal Group ended their association with him. In a press release they note: “The whistleblower disclosure did not speak to the specifics of the alleged classified information that Mr Grusch has now publicly characterized, and the substance of that information has always been outside of the scope of Compass Rose’s representation. Compass Rose took no position and takes no position on the contents of the withheld information.”

Despite this, it does appear that Congress will look into his claims during the summer.<sup>3</sup>

## GOVERNMENT SOURCES

For those with a knowledge of UFO history, we’ve been here before. In the late 1950s the newly formed National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP) pressed for congressional hearings, but were thwarted by the United States Air Force (USAF). The USAF felt that any hearings would make the public think there was something to the subject of UFOs, and they were not keen on pursuing the matter.

Republican Gerald Ford was able to get a House Armed Services Committee Hearing to consider the matter on 5 April 1966, where Secretary of the Air Force Harold D Brown said that out of 10,147 UFO cases studied from 1947 to 1965, 9,501 had been identified. He added that no one in his organisation believed UFOs were of extraterrestrial origin or were a threat to national security. This led to the formation of the Condon Committee to review the USAF’s Project Blue Book, and eventually to Blue Book being disbanded.

In the late 1960s the US Freedom of Information Act enabled groups like Ground Saucer Watch (GSW) to pursue government UFO files; other ufologists throughout the world have since gained access to classified files, but none of them has ever shown that the US or any other government has retrieved alien spacecraft or their living or dead occupants.



## LEAKING FILES

Filling the void, numerous ‘official’ UFO documents have been leaked. The most infamous being the Operation Majestic Twelve (MJ-12) project papers that showed the US Government ran a secret team to retrieve alien craft and bodies. It came to the attention of ufologists in 1984, and about 3,500 pages of MJ-12 related documents have been made public since 1987.

The Internet quickly became a fertile breeding ground for UFO revelations. One of the earliest and most notorious examples is the Lear Statement, which was posted by John Lear online on 29 December 1987 (**FT319:48-49**). Lear, the son of aviation pioneer William P Lear, claimed that on 30 April 1964 three saucers landed at Holloman Air Force Base in New Mexico, and a meeting was held between aliens and government officials. Five years later, the MJ-12 group signed a treaty with the aliens to gain their technology in return for letting them carry out abductions and cattle mutilations.

Late in 2005, a contact called ‘anonymous’, started sending information by email about the Serpo alien exchange programme (**FT209:42-44**). Using material from a 3,000-page document written in the late 1970s, ‘anonymous’ claimed that six aliens were recovered from the Roswell crash. There was one survivor from the crash that they called EBE 1, and he helped to arrange for 12 specially trained people to visit his home planet of Serpo in the Zeta Reticuli solar system.

Strong doubts have been cast on the Serpo story, which was probably seeded by former Air Force Office of Special Investigations (AFOSI) agent Richard Doty (see **FT317:38-40**). As early as 1983, Doty had told Linda Moulton-Howe a variation of this story. In this version only three humans were sent to the Zeta Reticuli system. One died during the mission, one went insane and the last one returned home safely but was kept in isolation. Doty is also the suspected mastermind behind documents relating to Project Aquarius, which morphed into the MJ-12 hoax and likely inspired the Lear Document.

**FACING PAGE:** David Grusch giving an interview to NewsNation. **LEFT:** John Lear.

## REMEMBRANCE OF ALIENS REVISITED

In May 1989, one of the most controversial whistleblowers, Bob Lazar, came forward to say that he actually worked in section S-4 at Papoose Lake, which is part of Area 51. He continues to this day to claim that the nine spacecraft held by the USA are powered by element 115 and that he saw briefing documents saying the extraterrestrials had been visiting us from Zeta Reticuli for at least 10,000 years. For good measure, he says he saw a living, child-sized alien as well as alien bodies. People believe him because he has constantly repeated the same old story to the media ever since; the Men In Black have obviously been slacking.

Another outstanding whistleblower was Lieutenant Colonel Philip Corso, who in the 1960s worked as the Chief of the Pentagon’s Foreign Technology unit, where, he claimed, they dealt with a mixture of recovered alien and Soviet technology for further development. His book *The Day After Roswell* (1997) alleged the Nazis had recovered a saucer during WWII, and that the aliens are genetically-engineered for space travel.

In a video ‘confession’ dated August 2014, Boyd Bushman, a scientist at Lockheed Martin, claims he worked on antigravity projects and alien technologies, having examined at least eight different types of alien spacecraft. He said he had even met and photographed an alien; they have long fingers and webbed feet, and hail from a planet known as Quintumnia. He also revealed that he had received death threats and that security personnel had attempted to discredit him and prevent him talking to the public. To prove his claims he showed a picture of an alien; it is actually a toy plastic alien doll.<sup>4</sup>

Mark Pilkington, in his 2010 book *Mirage Men* (review **FT266:59**), gives this sage advice: “People in positions of real power in the US and elsewhere hold all sorts of strange beliefs, whether they be about God, society, race, science or the economy. Doesn’t mean that we should believe them unless they can back up their claims.”

Essentially, all these stories are self-propagating rumours and hoaxes with not one shred of evidence to back them up. Then again, by Christmas...

## REFERENCES

- 1 thedebrief.org/intelligence-officials-say-u-s-has-retrieved-non-human-craft/
- 2 www.jasoncolavito.com/blog/ufo-whistleblower-has-suspiciously-close-ties-to-the-usual-suspects
- 3 imgur.com/a/LGL3WcL; compassrosepllc.com/news/; www.wired.com/story/ufo-whistleblower-us-congress-investigations/
- 4 metro.co.uk/2014/10/27/area-51-scientist-makes-amazing-deathbed-confession-about-aliens-4923532/



# IN SEARCH OF PAST LIVES

All sorts of people, from mystics to military leaders, believe they have lived previous lives in other times, while therapists and hypnotists offer the chance to relive memories of these existences. **SIMON YOUNG** offers a sceptic's experience of past life regressions.

**I**'m walking through a damp, flat landscape with reeds much taller than me. I look down and my green trousers are ragged and I seem not to have any shoes on. A short fat yellow snake darts out by my left foot. I'm tired. The war has gone on much longer than I had expected.

Ahead of me men – three? – are shouting as they hunt me. I know it is almost over. I'm partly relieved. I was here for something to do with a railway line. Perhaps I was meant to destroy it? Now I'm going to die. I see myself from above. I'm stretched out. I've been shot in my heart. Blood is spreading through the green rags: the remnants of a uniform. As I float up I think of my home on the other side of the world. I see three poplar trees blowing in the wind in a British garden. At their base is a vegetable patch where rabbits come. Regret floods through me that I cannot return. I had promised the trees that I would come back.

## PAST LIVES AND TRANCES

In October 2022, I sat for three afternoons with a past-life therapist. This vignette is taken from one of several past lives that I explored on those days. There was a good deal of conversation both before and after. But the trances, which were recorded, totalled just under four and a half hours: an average of about an hour and a half per day. The therapist had some 20 years of experience in the field. Allison is a charismatic American with a soft, memorable voice. I am a historian specialising in supernatural belief systems. I came to this experience as a sceptic. I find it difficult to believe that we survive death in any intelligible form, let alone that our personalities are decanted into other bodies. I am, though, passionately interested in trance states and past life regression depends on the patient entering a prolonged trance.

A trance state is a loose term that we apply to a range of different kinds of altered states of consciousness. A frequently experienced version of trance is the driver who cannot remember part of the journey between home and work because they have gone into autopilot. Repetitive, automatic actions seem particularly effective in inducing trance states: rhythmic dancing, drumming, singing, picking berries, factory work, meditative breathing, even aimlessly flicking between TV channels. Trance states are often also



**"I SEE THREE POPLAR TREES BLOWING IN THE WIND IN A GARDEN AND A VEGETABLE PATCH WHERE RABBITS COME"**

associated with exhaustion or sleep: we more easily enter trances while we are getting ready for bed, when we wake unexpectedly in the night, or while we are struggling up in the morning. These states can be useful because our conscious mind is partially or totally suspended. Information can emerge from our unconscious, much as happens in dreams.

**ABOVE:** One of the author's regressions involved a dying soldier's poignant memories of a garden with three poplar trees.

In fact, a trance state is often referred to as a 'dream state'. We are, in some versions of trance, effectively dreaming while awake.

My professional interest in trances comes from the fact that an unusual number of 'supernatural' experiences take place during repetitive actions or while entering or leaving sleep. Ghosts, fairies and aliens are far more likely to appear, say, to drivers (particularly at night) or people in their pyjamas than to someone talking to a friend at midday in Starbucks. Looking for insights into these experiences I've been intrigued by my own brushes with trance over the last few years, first and foremost because I want to understand the physiological mechanisms. I woke







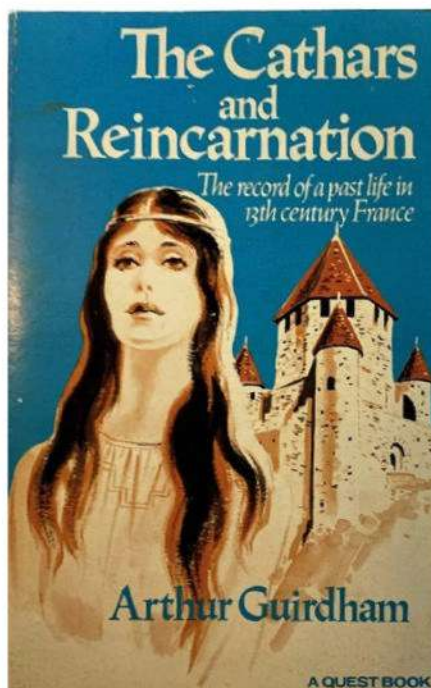
up one morning to see a spider crawling over my wife's face: the impossibly large spider disappeared as soon I tried to remove it. I have heard voices in meditation; not unlike the voices that come to many of us on the edge of sleep. I watched a figure (a friend absent in a town many miles away) walk across a room while I was enjoying a massage. I wanted to have experiences like this in a more sustained way, to be able to understand how they worked. A past-life regression offered just this kind of opportunity.

## GOING UNDER

Entering a trance proved, with Allison, surprisingly easy. I arrived primed and excited, and Allison steered the conversation towards the trance: pre-hypnotic cues are often fed into a talk. I don't know how important these cues proved here. But, after an hour of talk I felt slightly drunk, the walls pulsated and our voices echoed unreally. I told Allison I was 'wonky' and so we began the regression proper. She started me off with a simple visualisation exercise. This was an opening gambit. But I fell into the required groove. I saw my room, my bed, a window... then, boom! I saw a woman in a red dress. I couldn't see her face, but I could see the hair curling down the side of it. There was a small wooden box with a parchment roll in it. We were off!

The trances might be efficiently expressed in terms of motion. The experience, for me, was like a walk from about halfway up a hill to the peak and then a rush down the other side. At the beginning, it was all huffing and puffing. My conscious mind was chattering away. I was seeing something, but was it real? Was I making a fool of myself? Were these really the rules? What did Allison think of me? Was I cheating? It was difficult. But the succession of images got smoother and quicker. My conscious mind quieted and other forces took over. About 20 minutes in, I was walking down the other side of the hill. No, not walking. Jogging. Trying not to trip on the steep verge. Image came on image. Person on person. Event on event. I was still conscious, but only just. A vitals tracker I wear claimed (I saw afterwards) that I had nodded off: something that it had never previously done outside of sleep. My head had slumped and rested close to my shoulders. On the recording my voice had become more impersonal and sometimes slurred.

In the three days I fell in and out of six lives with some very unclear additional fragments. Sometimes there were moments from lives: the poor British soldier (a Chindit?) dying in a marsh far from home, I imagine towards the end of the Second World War. Sometimes there were more detailed worlds: the hopelessly inconsequential son of an 18th-century writer walking around his claustrophobic village. The young man had, in his early twenties, become obsessed with Muslim culture. He dreamed of visiting Istanbul. Then there were also much longer arcs of time. Take the Brazilian playboy who went to live in Toronto and who murdered



## IT PROVED AN IMPORTANT WORK, DETAILING THE 13TH-CENTURY MEMORIES OF A 'MRS SMITH'

his wife before getting cheated out of his fortune by a housekeeper. I tracked him from a dusty adolescent walk on the edge of a *barrio* to his death in Canada some seven decades later. He used, for the record, rat poison with his wife: she bored him terribly.

In doing a past life regression I was, of course, taking part in an experience that thousands of others have undergone. The investigation of past lives has, in fact, in modern Western culture, a pedigree stretching back to the 1800s. Beliefs tended not to be systematic then, but every so often they come floating to the surface. I recently, for instance, in my studies came across a 19th-century Irish man who was terrified that he would be reborn as a fox! In the last 150 years 'reincarnationism', as we might call it, has tightened up into an articulate series of beliefs. Some points are borrowed from Eastern religion: some invented on home turf by Spiritualists, Theosophists and their ilk. It is striking that by World War II several leaders believed that they had been reborn from previous martial existences. Patton famously considered himself the latest incarnation of Hannibal. Air Marshall Hugh Dowding wrote to Beaverbrook that they had known each other in a previous life as Steppe warriors.

Past life beliefs only really entered the mainstream, though, with the age of Aquarius. Arthur Guirdham's *The Cathars and Reincarnation* (1970 and frequently

LEFT: Arthur Guirdham's 1970 book *The Cathars and Reincarnation* played a key role in bringing the idea of past lives to the mainstream.

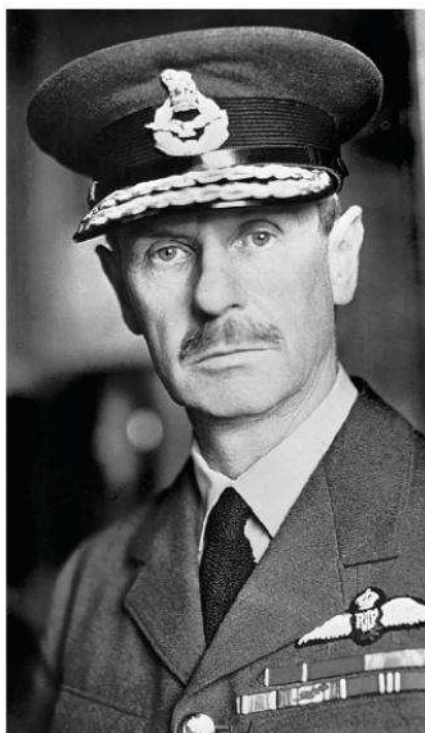
reprinted) proved an important work, detailing the 13th-century memories of a 'Mrs Smith'. The idea that you could access your own memories from before you were born and, crucially, that these might inform or explain your present life proved attractive in a narcissistic age. Fifty years later, we now have the popularisers. Brian Weiss remains the most important name here and some of his videos on YouTube offer you the chance to put yourself into a trance at home. Then there are the accredited academics who work around reincarnation. Particularly impressive are the writings of Ian Stevenson, who focused on Asia, and his successor Jim Tucker, who has also looked at case-studies from the West.

As with any belief system, there are disagreements and rival theologies. Is it really true that animal souls can be transplanted into humans? Or that some humans are descended (spiritually) from fairies, mermaids and even leprechauns? Is it possible that the same individuals crop up again and again in different roles, once a sister, say, now a mother or a wife or a lover? But, then, there are a number of beliefs that enjoy fairly wide consensus, that form the granite bedrock of reincarnationism. There is, for instance, a place between lives where we ready ourselves for our next journey. We do not, apparently, ricochet down through the centuries at random: we are supposed to learn from the errors of our previous lives. Then there are the specifics. For example, there is the claim that death injuries become birthmarks in the next life.

## THE MECHANICS

How does the experience of the trance unwind? The vast majority of images take place POV-style. I'm looking through the eyes of the person. It is very rarely that I'm looking at myself. In fact, one common feature of these lives was that I only very gradually, if at all, got a sense of what 'I' looked like. In one of the six I was a woman – a Scottish smallholder on a northern English moor. But it took some minutes for the sex to become clear: perhaps because that fact disturbed me. Likewise, the date and the location are never 'stated' as they would be in a film in a glorious white font: 'Mississippi, 1846' and so on. But time and place can usually be deduced. For all I was in a trance, my historical sense continued to operate. Indeed, that historical sense sometimes became tiresome. In the 18th-century village I saw a tall mill chimney and worried about whether this was possible at that date. Likewise, would a Scottish family (even a well-to-do one) really have had access to oranges at Christmas in the 1600s or the early 1700s? The chatter of the conscious mind retreats, but never disappears entirely.

I got better at the trances as I went along.



**ABOVE LEFT & CENTRE:** General George Patton and Air Marshall Hugh Dowding believed they had been reborn from previous lives as warriors. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Writer, psychiatrist and reincarnationist Arthur Guirdham. **BELOW:** Why did the bushy-bearded actor Brian Blessed recur from one past life regression to another?

I was better, in fact, after 40 minutes than I was after 10, and I was better on the third day than on the first. I particularly could see faces more exactly. As noted above, the woman in the red dress whom I met on the first day remained faceless. But on the third day I found myself sitting opposite my 18th-century aunt (the twin sister of my mother, whose maid had just cooked flapjacks). I could see her face in great detail and, were I a good draughtsman, I would have been able to reproduce her bemused, concerned expression and her enormous chin with a pencil.

I also became better at feeling out information as I traipsed around these shadow worlds. We have all run across the medium's trick, used consciously or unconsciously, in cold-reading clients. "I see a car... I'm not sure about the colour. It is not blue..." At which point the excited client shouts: "It was red!" I've always shaken my head at these tricks. But I frequently did something very similar in the trance, though with no client in front of me. I am in a shop. I know that there is something important there. The owner has a mole on his left cheek. But I know it is not him that matters. I see his daughter run by in the passage beyond. Not her, but closer. Then I see a flash of a woman's thighs. It is his wife. I'm having an affair with his wife... (I credit this to the Brazilian murderer).

There were strange flashes of information. Sometimes I would see or hear a word off to the right in my mind. At one point I could see the word 'tangerine' written, which became an image of oranges. This was often information that couldn't, for whatever reason, appear simply. But the word helped me to new

images. (Allison tells me this is unusual). At other times (and this is far more common, I am informed) I blurted out sentences as if they were common knowledge while talking about something else. The dead British soldier remembered, when back in his English sitting room, that his "brother had flown a plane and survived" [the war?]. How did the soldier know, given that he had not? The Brazilian mentioned in an aside that his daughter had died of a wasting illness in her teens. "She was the best of us." In these moments, I almost felt that someone else was talking through me.

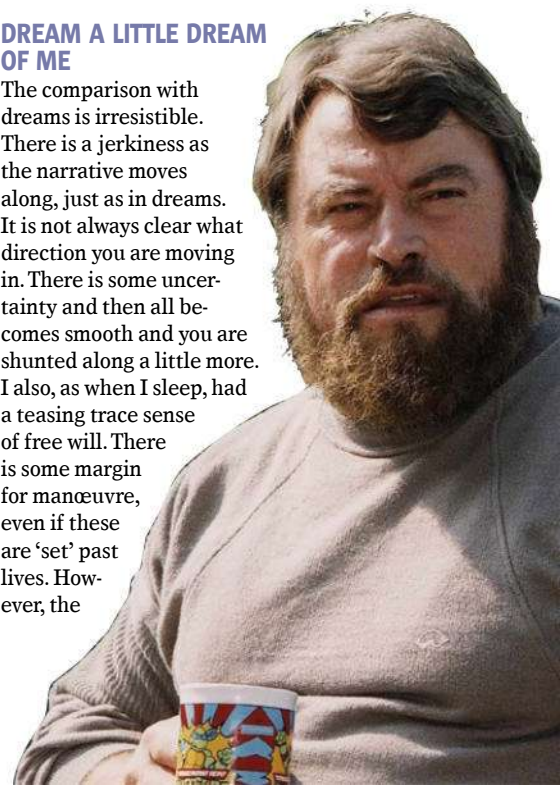
How deep was I 'in'? As noted above, my biological tracker claimed that I was asleep. But I was fully conscious at all times and I was able to remember the trance once I came to. Had the fire alarm gone off, I would have been able, at any point, to stand up – I did the regression hunched over a table – and just walk out into the street. Something I found more alarming was the way that the trance followed me into the world. On the third day, I came out of the regression and began to talk to Allison. However, whenever I closed my eyes to concentrate on her words, the images returned: my brain, with the small stimulus of bringing down my eyelids, turned the ignition key. It was unsettling.

The regressions, as dreams, had many derivative elements. In one trance I placed my feet in a stream with small white fish. The fish were, I said, "dreaming". This is stolen shamelessly from a Yeats poem. In a life in which I was apprenticed to a tribal priest, I stated that apprentices were picked by handing out cakes to the children. One cake had a hidden mark that identified the

future apprentice. I said this just after getting a particularly strong whiff of chocolate from a biscuit on the table. (When your eyes are closed for an hour smells become more intense.) Then there was the British actor Brian Blessed. Brian would not leave me alone! In three lives I encountered him. In one case he was my father, in another the father of the woman in the red dress and in a glimpse of another life he was a monk drawing sacred geometry. Did Blessed represent a figure who returns again and again in my lives with a large bushy beard and a thespian turn? Or does my brain have a disappointingly limited casting pool? I had, note, recently been watching *I Claudius*.

## DREAM A LITTLE DREAM OF ME

The comparison with dreams is irresistible. There is a jerkiness as the narrative moves along, just as in dreams. It is not always clear what direction you are moving in. There is some uncertainty and then all becomes smooth and you are shunted along a little more. I also, as when I sleep, had a teasing trace sense of free will. There is some margin for manoeuvre, even if these are 'set' past lives. However, the







ABOVE: "There was the Islamophilic fop musing on poetry at his private place, a great white tower on a Watership Down-style hill"

feel of the images was not the same as in my dreams. Most dreams are more, I would say, familiar, perhaps also more numinous. I don't agree with the majority opinion that trances are 'more real'. I found them shadowy. There was, to me, also something jarringly alien about these trance lives. They are similar to those occasional dreams we have where we wake up, shake our heads and say: "What has that to do with me?" It felt to me as if I had strayed into someone else's unconscious.

There is another difference between dreams and the regressions. Dreams tend to have familiar rhythms and personalities: they are, after all, us processing our experiences and concerns. For instance, I frequently meet in my dreams the male helper (an 'animus' in Jungian terms), a bearded and kind man who advises or assists me. The regressions had none of these familiar roles. The individuals could have come out of a character-driven novel. They were unnervingly themselves: and not easily reduced to a symbolic index. Dreams – at least my dreams – are simple narratives and the figures that appear in my dreams are subsumed in those narratives. Story trumps personality. In my trances, characters determined the narrative: the priorities were reversed. If a dream is a fairy tale, a regression is a *roman à clef*.

But in some respects the trances were like dreams. I could see, looking at the different lives, that they had common themes. Repeatedly, for instance, the question of

## THE SCENE THAT UPSET ME MOST WAS THAT OF THE LAST SECONDS OF THE SOLDIER'S LIFE

being linked to the land came up: a personal obsession. There was the Islamophilic fop musing on poetry at his private place, a great white tower on a Watership Down-style hill. There was the priest's apprentice going to a hidden glade near the Rhine. And don't get me started on the poplars... Of course, you can shake this out in two different ways. Are we creating trances out of our unconscious to address central preoccupations? Or is it just that the trance-haver has been spending the last half dozen lives trying to get this part of their personality straight?

So many details of these lives that sound like proof for or against authenticity can be, likewise, read in both ways. For instance, the British soldier was shot through the heart. I had, as a child, a birthmark just above my heart, which faded with the years. At this, a reincarnationist might nod, knowingly: birthmarks are associated (as noted above) with life-ending injuries. But I knew this when

I walked into Allison's room. Isn't it just as likely that my unconscious took inspiration from this knowledge? It would, of course, be possible to look for external proof that I could not have invented: a garden in middle England with three poplar trees and visiting rabbits. But that would be a long and tedious road-trip. And even if I did find the three trees, could I trust my memory?

### WAKING UP

As I explained in the introduction, I came to the experience an unbeliever: full credit to Allison that she worked with and around my scepticism. Did I change my mind? Immediately after I got home – while being impressed by the experience – I felt, if anything, more sceptical. I continued to be bothered by the idea that we survive death; and I was now also bothered by the idea that I had murdered my 19th-century wife. Writing my first notes, after almost a week, I was less sure. I was particularly struck by the continuing emotional power of some of the 'lives' I dipped in and out of.

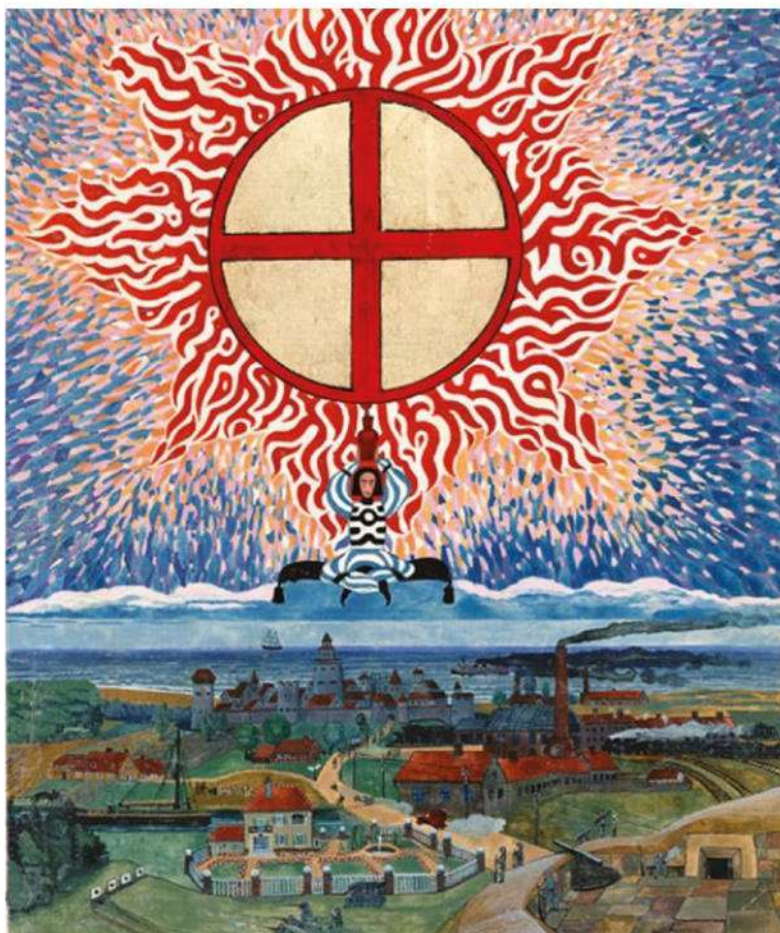
I cried three times in the trances. Once – eye-roll – was when the 18th-century fop became lyrical about the fall of Constantinople in 1453. A second scene was the Scottish woman talking, albeit indirectly, about her lack of children. But the scene that upset me most was that of the last seconds of the soldier's life and, above all, the regrets that accompanied his passing. I wept in the

regression, to the point where I started to fall out of the trance. Even several months later I'm still moved by his poplar trees. Allison called the image of the poplars a "portal", and while usually impatient with this kind of terminology I know what she means. If I think, here at the keyboard, of those trees, I have an emotional reaction.

But then, and this I'm sure is a general experience, I've wept in or after dreams. Emotional power is no guarantee of authenticity. And I've also had dreams, three or four times in my life, that have changed who I am. As Emily Bronte has Kathy say in *Wuthering Heights*: "I've dreamt in my life dreams that have stayed with me ever after, and changed my ideas: they've gone through and through me, like wine through water." Perhaps 'dreams of horn' bring emotions and life-changes in a more measured, occasional way: but don't the trances and dreams ultimately have similar consequences?

Putting the finishing touches to this essay some three or four months after I said goodbye to Allison, it is the 'consequences' that now interest me more than the comparatively trifling question of the truth or not of past lives. Yes, dreams can change us. Sometimes, also, we have experiences that adjust who we are: a death, a breakup, an illness... I realise now, four months after the therapy finished, that the regressions altered me. I didn't particularly notice in the first days because I was focused on the experience itself. In the weeks that followed I felt 'different', a little detached. But I didn't worry overly. I certainly didn't think of it as a result of sitting in a trance at a table for three afternoons.

However, about eight weeks after the regressions, there was a click. I started to return to my older personality. This will sound strange, and it felt strange. I hadn't really been aware of being a new person: I'd just considered myself in a prolonged fugue state. But returning to who I was has proved painful, like grating a poorly-fitting gate over concrete, and I certainly noticed that. What had shifted? I find it far more difficult to write about the (temporary) switches in my personality than supposed crimes or idiocies in past lives. So allow me to remain artfully vague here. I will say, though, that a number of unpleasant but all too familiar mental habits have, since Christmas, besieged me. It was only as I began to experience them again that I realised I had been free of them since my three trance sessions.



LEFT: Jungian analysis has employed the idea of 'active imagination', as pictured in Jung's own paintings in the *Red Book*.

Psychologists, and particularly Jungian psychologists, have worked for years with 'active imagination' to create imagined narratives that can then be exploited to direct personal development. (I've experimented with this form in interviews about supernatural experiences.) In their most common form, scripted stories are cranked through the unconscious. "You are walking in a wood when you come to a house: what does the house look like?" "In an upstairs room there is a crystal ball. What do you see in it?" Etc etc. But compare this scripted vision walk with the 'lives' presented above. The cues in the pre-determined stories resemble a multiple-choice test exam: the tedium of 'a', 'b', 'c'

and 'd'. The past life trance is the equivalent of giving the student a blank piece of paper, clapping them on the back and inviting them to write their heart out.

Perhaps belief in past lives is beside the point – though I imagine that interested scepticism works much better in a regression than aggressive disbelief, and belief better than scepticism. If you can access these trances, you have a resource to hand. Therapists will tell you that dream work can be done alone, but that 'active imagination' should be done under guidance. This is surely excellent advice. But let us also acknowledge that any glimpse into ourselves is of value, especially when the terrain is uninviting and difficult to negotiate access. Arthur's knights, on their impossible quest for the Grail, entered the forest "there where they saw it to be thickest, all in those places where they found no way or path..."

With a proper sense of trepidation, I hope to scramble through the forest of trance again.

*Allison Lee Axinn works out of Pietrasanta in Tuscany. The author thanks her for cooperating with the writing of this article.*

In some respects, this was depressing. But I could console myself that there is never, for the personality, a return to a baseline. Rather there is a new baseline: near to the original, yes, but separate enough for us to acknowledge progress. There is also the important knowledge that it is possible to live well without certain mental tics. The foot has made a tiny bit more space for itself in a tightly fitting shoe. I had gone to Allison to learn more about trance-states and to pull back the curtain on the workings of the mind. But something much more unexpected had happened: I had recognised a potential for change. Some past-life therapists boast that regressions can help with addictions. I would no longer be as sceptical as I once was about those claims.

## POSTSCRIPT

A season after meeting Allison, my views are much the same as before I began: I can't bring myself to take past lives seriously. However, I happily acknowledge that there is something extremely powerful lurking in Allison's room. Let's say, for the sake of argument, that these past lives are just incredibly ornate dreams, formed by the unconscious in a trance state. That means that we have access to visions that tell us about our most private workings and that bring hidden mechanisms and habits to the surface. Here are meaningful if haphazard adventures to be had: an acid trip without the chemicals or danger.

❖ **SIMON YOUNG** is a British folklore historian based in Italy and a regular contributor to *Fortean Times*. His most recent publication is *The Nail in the Skull and Other Victorian Urban Legends* (University Press of Mississippi 2022).



# STEPPING BACK IN TIME WITH PAST LIFE REGRESSION

A woman regresses to the end of a past life in Viking times and a man relives a previous existence as a WWI aircraft gunner. Clinical hypnotist **PAUL GODDARD** describes some of his experiences as a specialist in past life regression...

**I**t was the winter of 2021. We'd packed the Christmas decorations away and many of us held our New Year celebrations in small lockdown bubbles. To meet with friends and family outside our group, we had to go online. Some Internet groups with existing followings broadcast regularly to entertain and comfort those who didn't have company at home or needed a life beyond their immediate household.

## 'FREYA' AND HER TALE

One such live broadcaster was a woman called Charlene who regressed back to a time when she was called 'Freya'. We learned that she was on a boat and that the sea was rough. As you can imagine, she was very nervous, but her brave partner and son kept her calm while she talked to us. However, she wasn't talking in 2021: for her, the year was 889 and the boat was a Viking vessel. 'Freya' was communicating in one of many online past life regression sessions I conducted for various groups.

Along with my viewers, I was curious to know where 'Freya' and her family were heading. At first, she only said: "We're travelling to find new land to grow our community." I asked her to move forward in time and describe what she could see now. "I can't see anything," she said. This is common when someone is asked to travel beyond their timeline in a past life. Starting to realise what was happening, viewers began posting comments such as "This isn't going to end well!" Because Charlene's eyes were closed, she couldn't have been led by viewers' comments as tension mounted among the online audience. Continuing the regression, I took 'Freya' forward to her final 10 minutes in that lifetime.

'Freya' was showing signs of distress as water began to flood the boat. As a trained hypnotherapist, I knew that if I didn't take action, a strong abreaction (release of a previously repressed emotion or trauma through hypnosis or suggestion) was about to happen. After taking Charlene back to when she knew she was safe, I suggested



that she would now only experience emotions with which she was comfortable. Then I took 'Freya' forward again to the final moments of that past life.

With a thunderous crash, a giant wave engulfed the boat and swept her son away. Some viewers began sobbing, and I later learned that the images Charlene shared seemed so real that others were gripping their chairs as the drama unfolded. In her final seconds, Charlene described debris from the boat hitting her head. Viewers held their breath as I counted down to zero and 'Freya' reached the end of her life. Next, after experiencing a completely white room, Charlene was greeted happily by her family, who had perished earlier.

After any past life, dramatic or not, I always ask if the client would like healing. Charlene said she would. At this point, it's important to realise that even though people are watching, a hypnotherapist has a duty of care to allow appropriate time for healing. After bringing Charlene out of deep hypnosis, it was clear to everyone that she was okay and happy after the experience.

## PAST LIFE REGRESSIONS

So, what was going on here? The account of 'Freya' and her watery passing is just one of many past life regressions I've done using hypnosis since 2010. Sceptics might

argue that a client's experience in the hypnotic state is just their subconscious mind fantasising. On the other hand, a believer would argue that they are experiencing genuine memories of a previous existence.

I class myself as an explorer in this fascinating subject. To help break this down, I like to use the methodology of the late, great Dr Ian Stevenson, founder and director of the Division of Perceptual Studies at the University of Virginia School of Medicine (obit **FT224:28-29**). Dr Stevenson travelled the world interviewing children who'd had spontaneous past life memories. He reported how, as they began to speak, the children told stories of other lives they'd lived. Although he based his findings on these interviews, I believe they also fit well with hypnotic regressions.

Let's look at Dr Stevenson's non-paranormal interpretations, starting with fraud. We all know that the paranormal field is open to fraud. However, Dr Stevenson found little evidence of this. I share his observation: many of my clients want to undergo the regression experience for their own personal reasons and are reluctant to share their story with others. It seems unlikely to me that anyone would pay me to conduct a regression, then lie about something that wouldn't go any further. To hear the emotions in the voices



ABOVE LEFT: Paul Goddard conducting a session. ABOVE RIGHT: Steve Mulligan, who experienced memories of being WWI aircraft gunner Sydney Sutcliffe.

of clients such as Charlene, they would have to be award-winning actors to carry off such a deceit.

Fantasy was another interpretation that Stevenson considered. Could it be that, as in dreams, what clients' subconscious minds produce are metaphors to help them process what's going on in their current life? Perhaps, too, past life regressions are explicable by cryptomnesia: things we've read, heard, seen and forgotten consciously that remain in our subconscious to be reawakened later under hypnosis. Or maybe it's down to paramnesia, in which confabulation adds material that did not appear in the original session. That's why I always video sessions, which ensures that no detail is missed or misinterpreted.

And then there's the idea of cellular memory, where organ transplant patients sometimes adopt a new interest or skill that they didn't have before receiving an organ (FT100:12, 159:24, 236:18-19, 326:23, 348:54-55). Taking this further, you could argue that memory is perhaps stored in genes and transferred down the family line.

Next, there are possible paranormal interpretations such as ESP (Extra Sensory Perception), reincarnation and possession. Dr Stevenson investigated the possibility that a child could be possessed, but I wouldn't say anyone has ever shown signs of possession in one of my sessions. Perhaps, however, the client is experiencing some form of channelling.

## MEMORY AND PLACE

To get back to my experiences, I haven't just focused on using hypnosis for individuals' past lives. On one occasion, I was invited to appear in the popular paranormal television series *Help! My House is Haunted* to take one of the team back to the 'place memory' of a former Methodist Chapel. Under hypnosis, Barri Ghai was able to navigate the building with his eyes closed and saw the chapel in its heyday of 1825. Another time, I repeated this experiment at St Briavels Castle, Lydney,

during Jayne Harris's HD Paranormal event. I hypnotised several groups and suggested they tune into the place memory of the castle to see it during its working life. (This time the groups remained seated as large numbers of people walking around with their eyes closed could have caused problems!) The experiment was successful, with several participants from different groups mentioning the same historical names.

Although I've conducted past life regressions for many years, there are always occasions when you learn something new. Hosts Jane and Lorian asked me onto their *The Ghost Voice* YouTube channel to hypnotise Richard Felix, a historian well known in the paranormal field (especially for his appearances on *Most Haunted*). I'm used to hypnotising people who hold varying beliefs regarding reincarnation. However, as Richard was interested but quite sceptical, it took him some time to get a regression. When he did, he saw himself as a guard on a stagecoach; the weather was bone-chilling and he repeatedly told us how cold he felt. He also laughed because the coach didn't seem to have any suspension. He was freely and easily describing what he saw and experienced until an audience member asked: "Who is the King?" Going against all my experience, I asked Richard the question. Immediately, he answered, "I know, but he wouldn't know," which jerked my hypnotised subject out of his past life. After this, I was able to continue the regression, but Richard seemed less deep in hypnosis and was more inclined to describe his experience in third-person rather than first-person terms.

I do ask about and test historical facts during my regressions, but for the best outcome questions must be relevant. On occasion, I've conducted a regression where someone was a servant or directly employed by the monarchy: I'll ask who the monarch is, as this is directly relevant to the subject's life. If it's not relevant, I won't ask, as it's always important that the conversation should flow naturally.

Sometimes people experience déjà vu or a feeling of 'home' in a certain place. Jayne Harris's emotional attachment to Scotland came out during a regression I did with her and Steve Mulligan from the Paradox Club. Steve, we discovered, believed he had been a WWI Flight Lieutenant called Sydney Sutcliffe in a previous life. Sutcliffe had lived in Llandudno, which explains why, as a child, Steve knew his way around the town even though he'd never lived there. During his regression as Sydney, Steve experienced fond memories of watching his father, entertainer Abraham "Arthur" Sutcliffe, perform on stage in the North Wales coastal resort. As he told *Wales Online*: "Since my childhood I've always been drawn to Llandudno, even when I came here as a child I knew my way around and my mum used to be amazed at how I knew where to go. When we'd be walking round it was like I was having déjà vu, like I'd been there before. It wasn't until someone suggested doing a past life regression that all of this came spilling out."

## REGRESSION AS THERAPY

I hope the foregoing gives a snapshot of the fascinating world of past life regressions. The examples discussed are just a few of the regressions that I've conducted. There are many more. Whether you believe in reincarnation or not, the benefits and therapeutic value that I've seen with people going through this experience shouldn't be dismissed. For example, I've seen clients who've lost their fear of water after witnessing themselves drowning, or no longer fearing death, but moving forward through life with a renewed determination to make the most of their time on Earth. Others have said that what they experienced during a regression has helped them cope with issues in their current lives.

Whether you believe in it or not, past life regression continues to fascinate us, to concentrate client's minds and to prompt debate. Maybe you should try it sometime. Who knows what you might discover?



# FAIRY ORIGINS

Pagan survivals? Folk memories? Degenerated gods? Where exactly did Britain's fairies come from? And what part did Roman occupiers, Christian missionaries and mediæval romancers play in their creation? **FRANCIS YOUNG** attempts to untangle the complex history and murky origins of Britain's supernatural beings.

For many decades British folklorists have been largely silent on the difficult question of where fairies come from. There has been a great deal of discussion of where fairies go – “always going, never gone” – why fairy belief declined, and the fairies' modern and literary transformations, but when it comes to their origin scholars are usually content to report what people *say* about the origin of the fairies rather than to delve into this contested history. One exception to this was Diane Purkiss, who in her book *Troublesome Things* (2000) tentatively linked Europe's fairies with the bogeys of the ancient Greek nursery; but this was more historical psychoanalysis than history. This reticence among modern folklorists contrasts with the confidence of earlier scholars like Walter Evans-Wentz, Lewis Spence and even Katharine Briggs, who were willing to wonder where the fairies came from. Indeed, Briggs's conclusion that fairies were probably spirits of the ancestral dead has become a sort of folkloric orthodoxy, influential on Emma Wilby's portrayal of early modern fairy lore as a kind of debased animism. However, there are two other major ideas about what fairies are that lurk in the popular consciousness, a kind of intellectual detritus left behind by the fossicking of an earlier generation of folklorists.

## EUHEMERISTS AND DEGENERATIONISTS

The first of these ideas, and the least respectable, is the 'euhemerist' idea that fairy lore represents a folk memory of real people – a lost race, small in stature, who were driven to the hills, caves and wilds by later invaders and reverted to a hunter-gatherer lifestyle, occasionally stealing the children of the settled farmers. This 'pygmy theory' of fairies, which is actually as old as the 17th century, was popularised in the 19th century by David MacRitchie and supercharged by Victorian ideas of race and racial hierarchies. The colonial and racist overtones of the idea are inescapable, even if it inspired some fine weird fiction by the likes of John Buchan, Arthur Machen and David Lindsay. Yet it is easy to forget that 'pygmy theory' was never universally accepted, and many Victorian folklorists gave it short shrift as too neat an explanation for a complex problem. A more influential theory among scholars was what



we might term 'degenerationism', the idea that fairies were the degenerate, diminished remains of former pagan deities.

Degenerationism shared some characteristics with 'pygmy theory'; the pagan gods, formerly of human (or superhuman) size had dwindled over time to a small stature; and they had been banished from the heavens to the remote places of the Earth. But degenerationists never claimed the fairies had been real people; rather, it was a religious and cultural image of deities that underwent a process of degeneration. The supposed evidence for this claim could be adduced

from 'Celtic' literature, primarily in Irish and Welsh, where we encounter the names of deities attached to characters in mediæval narratives. Clearly, scholars argued, narratives such as the Four Branches of the Mabinogi were Christianised versions of much older tales, transmitted orally across the centuries, involving gods and goddesses. The process of degeneration, it could be reasonably supposed, took place during the 'Dark Ages', that mysterious period between the withdrawal of Rome from Britain and the reappearance of writing and literature in Britain – the 'Age of Arthur' when, conveniently, some of the most





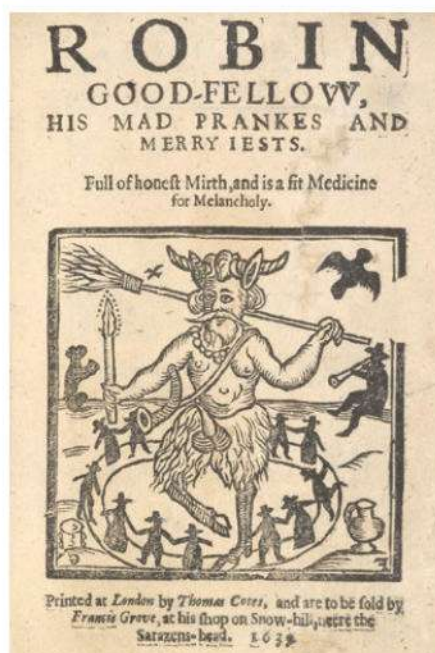
**FACING PAGE:** A faun surrounded by fairies in an 1840 engraving. **ABOVE:** Fairy imagery from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in *The Quarrel of Oberon and Titania* by Sir Joseph Noel Paton, 1849. **BELOW:** The mischievous figure of Robin Goodfellow pictured on the title page of *Robin Goodfellow, His Mad Pranks and Merry Jest* from 1629.

compelling mediæval supernatural literature seemed to be set.

The 'degenerationist' thesis, while it remains popular in British culture, is flawed in several ways. For one thing, there is one major cultural influence on Britain that it appears to ignore entirely. Reading some books about the 'Celtic' origins of fairies, we might be forgiven for thinking that prehistoric stories of Iron Age gods and goddesses were transmitted straight to the Dark Ages where they were transformed and eventually elaborated into Arthurian literature. Yet most of the island of Britain was under Roman occupation for almost 400 years, and underwent profound religious transformations even before the advent of Christianity. The frequent absence of the Romans from popular accounts of 'Celtic' Britain perhaps owes something to the influence of Irish mythology as a framework within which people try to make sense of 'Celtic' culture; and in Ireland, of course, it really is true that a pagan Iron Age gave way directly to an early mediæval Christian era. Yet this was not what happened in Britain, and any account of the development of religious and folkloric ideas in ancient Britain that ignores the Romans is eccentric indeed.

Secondly, the idea that fairies are degenerated pagan gods overlooks the fact that a generally well-understood hierarchy of supernatural beings existed in the ancient world, in which there were both gods and 'godlings' – those minor spirits of nature and human destiny who enjoyed unofficial rural and

## ROBIN GOODFELLOW ~THE EARLY MODERN ENGLISH FAIRY PAR EXCELLENCE~MIGHT HAVE BEEN THE ROMAN NATURE GOD FAUNUS



domestic cults, like the satyrs, nymphs, lares and penates. As early as the 17th century, the antiquary John Aubrey had suggested that Robin Goodfellow – the early modern English domestic fairy *par excellence* – might once have been the Roman nature god Faunus, who had somehow survived the departure of the Romans and the Christianisation of Britain. 19th- and 20th-century folklorists disregarded Aubrey's speculation as a matter of course, as part and parcel of the naïve Classicising of baroque antiquaries. But Aubrey's instincts, as we shall see, may not have been quite as far off the mark as they seemed to his immediate successors.

Thirdly, degenerationism requires us to adopt a particular view about the way religious beliefs rise and decline, which is no longer tenable. For gods and goddesses to persist in some sort of increasingly degenerate form in a Christian society, we must presume that pre-Christian religious beliefs survive and linger as a result of imperfect conversion, as a sort of 'underground paganism' in an ostensibly Christian mediæval society. But this 'survivalist' view of pagan belief, associated most famously with Margaret Murray, has been comprehensively challenged since the 1970s – and elegantly demolished in book after book by the *doyen* of British pagan studies, Professor Ronald Hutton. In one recent book, *Queens of the Wild* (2022), Hutton suggests we replace the delusion of survival with a recognition that mediæval people were more than capable of constructing their own non-Christian supernatural figures within



the context of a Christian society. The mediæval peasant did not simply exist in the inert intellectual state imagined by scholars of the 1960s, subjected to a barrage of Christian dogma in church while clinging stubbornly to residual paganism in the home.

### FROM GODS TO DEMONS

Some of our inherited assumptions about fairies, then, are grounded in outdated approaches to folklore such as the idea of widespread 'survivalism'. It is possible, indeed, that in some cases minor cults of spirits did occasionally survive Christianisation: the best candidates for these in Britain are associated with well-worship and other bodies of water. But in the main it is wise to set aside the idea of wholesale survival. Between the withdrawal of Roman authority in 410 and the re-establishment of Christian hegemony in Britain at the end of the seventh century, Britain underwent unimaginable cultural and religious transformations whose exact nature can still only be guessed at; but we know pagan Germanic peoples established control of the south and east of the island, perhaps driving out the original Christianised British inhabitants or absorbing them into the pagan community. What is less clear is whether the Britons in the north and west remained resolutely Christian – or did a kind of Iron Age paganism make some sort of return? We can only guess, but the structures of the Church seem to have collapsed along with urban life. Evidence for the same chaotic period from Gaul and Iberia reveals a vibrant pagan-influenced folk religion that co-existed with official Christianity, and something similar in Britain seems likely.

Whatever the truth, Christian missionaries – whether from Ireland or Rome – often unwittingly preserved that folk religion by demonising it. While another age might have denied the reality of pagan gods and spirits, the missionaries of late antiquity preferred to reinvent gods and goddesses as demons. It did not always go according to plan, and demonisation might be followed by 'undemonisation', where a supernatural being deemed evil by the Church would undergo a further transformation as it became less threatening. The most famous example of such a process is the Devil of folklore, who is a considerably less threatening figure than the Devil of theology and often becomes the dupe of saints in folk-hagiographies. While the Devil of theology is a threatening personification of absolute evil, the Devil of folklore is a foil for saints and serves to explain landscape features and prehistoric monuments.

### FAIRIES AND FANTASIES

The word 'fairy' was a late import to Britain – so late, in fact, that it has no real relevance to the early evolution of Britain's godlings. A



LEFT: A handsome woodwose or wild man at St Mary's Church, Burwell, Cambridgeshire.

## ST ISIDORE WAS THE CHANNEL THROUGH WHICH KNOWLEDGE OF FAUNS, SATYRS, NYMPHS AND GIANTS FILTERED BACK INTO THE CHRISTIAN WORLD

more relevant word is its predecessor, 'elf', which was originally applied quite specifically to a mysterious category of beings in Germanic mythology who were linked to unearthly beauty, magic and supernatural harm. Elves were just one small part of the Anglo-Saxon supernatural world – and they were, at least, initially, all male. The supernatural women of Germanic mythology were, if anything, even more important – the *haegtessan* (ancestors of later 'hags'), *maeran* (ancestors of later 'nightmare') and *burgrunan* (spirits of destiny akin to the Norns or 'Wyrd Sisters', famously portrayed by Shakespeare). These were just some of the rich supernatural ecology of Anglo-Saxon England, much of which remains rather mysterious and included dwarfs, giants and dragons – albeit these were not quite the familiar figures of modern fantasy literature!

The marginalisation of English culture that followed the Norman Conquest seems to have greatly simplified England's supernatural world. By the time mediæval authors began writing again about the folk beliefs of native English people in the

12th century, the word 'elf' seems to have become a sort of catch-all term for supernatural otherworlders who dwelt under the earth and sometimes attempted to trick or ensnare the unwary. The elves of the 12th century and after, who became the fairies in the south of England by a process of re-naming from the 14th century onwards, merged features of the dwarfs, hags, and *burgrunan* of previous ages. However, mediæval fairy lore was also powerfully influenced by the writings of the Fathers of the Church, who commented extensively on the godlings of the Roman world. St Anthony was said to have met centaurs and satyrs, and the apparent presence of satyrs in the Bible elicited much interest.

Above all, it was the writings of the seventh-century Spanish encyclopædist St Isidore of Seville that proved influential; Isidore became the narrow channel through which knowledge of fauns, satyrs, nymphs and giants filtered back into the Christian world. Such beings were, in the first instance, objects of learned speculation; but learning translated into vernacular preaching by clergy eager to discourage the veneration of nature spirits, and Isidore provided a hermeneutic within which learned clerics could make sense of such veneration. Yet the 'Chinese whispers' of the Church Fathers also had the effect that some beings underwent strange transformations. For example, St Jerome (the translator of the standard Latin Bible, the Vulgate) translated a Hebrew word for hairy demons as *pilosi*, 'the hairy ones', thus linking the Bible with a Roman tradition of *dæmonology* in which fauns, incubi, and *pilosi* were kindred or interchangeable beings. *Pilosi* came to be glossed as *fauni*, and these beings later came to be identified with the *wuduwasan* or 'woodwoses' of Anglo-Saxon and mediæval England (see FT318:28-33).

The English woodwose, with his hair-covered body and club, is thus the descendant of the Roman faun, via the biblical glosses of the Church Fathers – in spite of the fact that the woodwose shares scarcely any of the Pan-like features the Romans ascribed to fauns, such as hooves and horns. Yet the woodwose was more than merely a decorative feature of mediæval art; famously, the 12th-century chronicler Ralph of Coggeshall (see FT377:40-45) recounted the capture of a *Homo silvestris* (a direct Latin translation of 'woodwose', man of the woods) swimming off the coast of Suffolk at Orford. At least some mediæval people believed in woodwoses, and even experienced them.

However, the evidence suggests that mediæval belief in otherworlders – a better term, perhaps, than 'fairies' – was both varied and chaotic, with few discernible





WELLCOME COLLECTION

ABOVE: Macbeth confronts the 'weird sisters' and their familiars – but were these witches really fairies in early modern form?

patterns. The kind of clear classification of folkloric beings beloved of Katharine Briggs is simply impossible to apply to the mixed bag of late mediæval evidence. Furthermore, it is at this time that fairies first appeared in literature, usually as majestic enchantresses. For decades, debate has raged about the folkloric value of mediæval literature; should the romances be treated as purely imaginative works of fiction, or are they an expression of what ordinary people really believed about fairies? The latter is somewhat unlikely; the romances, after all, were not written for ordinary people but for a literate or semi-literate aristocracy and gentry. Mediæval authors understood the concept of imaginative literature, and arguably the concept of fantasy, and the idea that they were hidebound by the real-world beliefs of their contemporaries seems unrealistically naïve. It may be that the romances are no more a faithful representation of mediæval supernatural belief than the Harry Potter novels are a faithful portrayal of late 20th-century British attitudes to magic.

Nevertheless, in the same way that contemporary fantasy literature has influenced occultists and popular culture, it seems likely that romance influenced and formed fairy belief. By the late 15th-century a clearer idea of the fairies was forming: they were an alternative society, headed by a king or queen, who could be solicited for magical aid but who also presented a great deal of danger. Fairies stole children and replaced them with changelings, or afflicted

children with illnesses that could be cured only by 'fairy doctors' (see FT373:30-37). The fairies could be both beautiful and ugly, both human-sized and diminutive (but not tiny); they dwelt under the earth, especially in mounds or near bodies of water, and required the assistance of humans for some activities – but no human visitor should ever eat their food. They existed within the realm of popular religion – not entirely disconnected from Christianity, but certainly problematic as far as the Church was concerned. In one ecclesiastical trial from 1499, a Suffolk family were hauled before the Bishop's Commissary because they asked their parish priest to bless a magical holly branch given to them by the fairies which they intended to use to find buried treasure.

In the 16th century, fairy lore was a mainstay of the trade of cunning folk and other magicians, and while the Reformation renewed efforts to demonise the fairies, their status as more ambiguous and marginal figures than angels and demons made them ideal sources of magic for those seeking to escape the humdrum, or realise supernatural wealth. It is in the early modern period that English fairy lore achieved its familiar form, immortalised by Shakespeare in plays such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *The Tempest* and *Macbeth* – for the 'weird sisters' of the Scottish Play are of course fairies, not 'witches'. It was this early modern fairy lore that sometimes sprang from the tortured lips of those who suffered at the hands of

17th-century witchfinders – the tormented wreck of an ancient folklore twisted into the diabolical by the paranoid imaginations of the likes of Matthew Hopkins and John Stearne (FT198:30-36).

### COMPLEX ACCRETIONS

The story of Britain's godlings is an immensely complex one. There is no single reductive explanation for fairies, and nor should we expect one. On the one hand, the fairies of Britain belong to what is perhaps a near-universal human phenomenon: belief in pre-industrial rural societies in a parallel society of supernatural yet earthbound almost-human beings can be found from Indonesia to the Yucatan. It is certainly possible to approach fairy lore from an anthropological perspective. However, it is also important to remember that these beings have a distinct history in each country where they form part of people's lived experience. The fairies of Britain have their own history, distinct from the otherworlders of Ireland (for example), even if there are some probable commonalities. That history reflects the complexity of Britain's own; the folkloric beings of Britain represent complex accretions of many centuries, combining elements from disparate cultures and even learned speculations that found their way into folk-belief.

♦ FRANCIS YOUNG is the author of *Twilight of the Godlings: The Shadowy Origins of Britain's Supernatural Beings*, published by Cambridge University Press.



# REVISITING ARTHUR C CLARKE'S WORLD OF STRANGE POWERS

PART  
3

In 1985, Arthur C Clarke was back in our living rooms with a follow-up to his *Mysterious World* series, this time focusing on such wild talents as premonitions, telepathy and stigmata. **RYAN SHIRLOW** concludes his reassessment of a forteen TV classic.

And so, as all good things must come to an end, our nostalgic trawl through Arthur C Clarke's *World of Strange Powers* draws to its close, and our review of his 1980s TV output is complete.

What remaining mysteries will these last few episodes bring? Have the producers started to run out of ideas? And how will Clarke wrap up the show?

Join me as we press play on the Network DVD and discover, one last time, what the grinning crystal skull has in store for us...

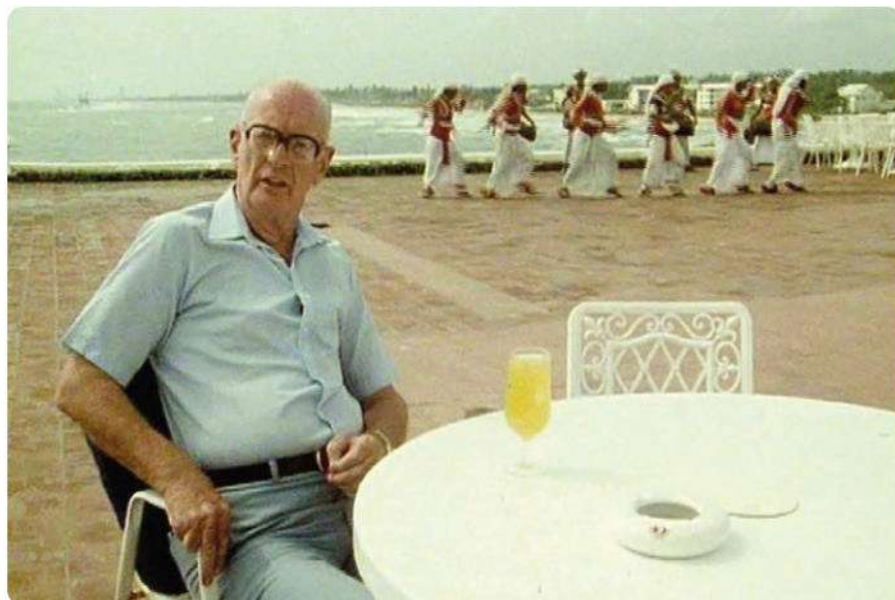
## EPISODE 9: WALKING ON FIRE

We join Clarke in Kataragama, one of the holiest sites in his adopted home of Sri Lanka, where pilgrims of various faiths atone for their sins by walking for miles on nails or piercing their flesh with cruel hooks and twisted spikes.

*Hellraiser* writer/director Clive Barker was surely inspired by images of these lunatics, suspended from gibbets and dragging carnival floats with the chains embedded in their backs. They make the stern Presbyterian marching men of my youth seem like gentle fellows out for a Sunday promenade.

Local professor Carlo Fonseka<sup>1</sup> studies the willing victims in terms of physics and physiology: pinching the skin minimises the risk of bleeding, and using the correct number of hooks spreads the load, keeping the tension beneath the crucial breaking point of flesh. Fonseka believes the religious element is superfluous, his volunteers surviving only on their self-belief and a handful of cigarettes.

The climax of the festival is a fire walk, with the coals reaching 800 degrees Centigrade – yet a series of men and women stroll across them unharmed. Similar practices are reported in Greece, Spain, Fiji and Japan, although sadly the combination of darkness, smoke, and rapid movement





## METHODIST MINISTER ERIC ROBINSON WAS BADLY BURNED IN A CAREFULLY PREPARED ATTEMPT

makes for some very poor TV footage.

At the Insight Centre in California, fire-walking has been repurposed into the climax to a modern-day inspirational seminar. Facilitator Tony Robbins focuses on the power of the mind, rather than the physics beneath the feet. Robbins is still going strong; he crops up in news reports occasionally when his demonstrations go wrong, although the numbers injured are tiny compared to the thousands he has shepherded safely across the coals.<sup>2</sup>

Back in Colombo, Fonseka is convinced there is more to fire walking than positive thinking, 'clap trap' and 'mumbo jumbo', as he tells a delighted Clarke. Back in 1935 paranormal researcher Harry Price showed, working with the Kashmiri magician Kuda Bux,<sup>3</sup> that the feet simply don't stay in contact with the coals for long enough to burn. To confirm this hypothesis, physicist Jearl Walker demonstrates the 'Leidenfrost effect',<sup>4</sup> trusting a vaporised layer of sweat to insulate his soles.<sup>5</sup> But Clarke warns us that not everyone is so lucky, as Methodist Minister Eric Robinson was badly burned in a carefully prepared attempt in 1952.

Fonseka goes as far as giving his volunteers liquor and pork to negate any supernatural protection from their latent religious beliefs. But he practises what he preaches, and has a go at fire walking himself for the cameras. For a moment it looks as if Clarke might join him; but our man is saved by the end credits.

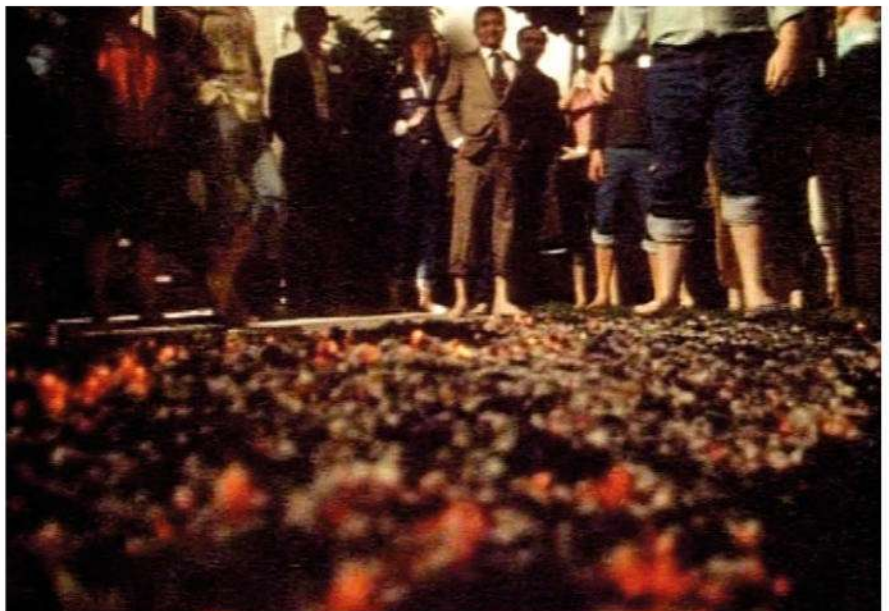
The scientific discussion on fire walking hasn't really moved on much since this episode, as a useful *National Geographic* survey shows.<sup>6</sup>

### EPISODE 10: MESSAGES FROM THE DEAD

Clarke begins at an old Dutch church in the ancient Sri Lankan port of Galle, filled with the graves of the colonists' children. He uses their loss to introduce the seductive lure of Spiritualism: "Is it anything more than wishful thinking?" he asks.

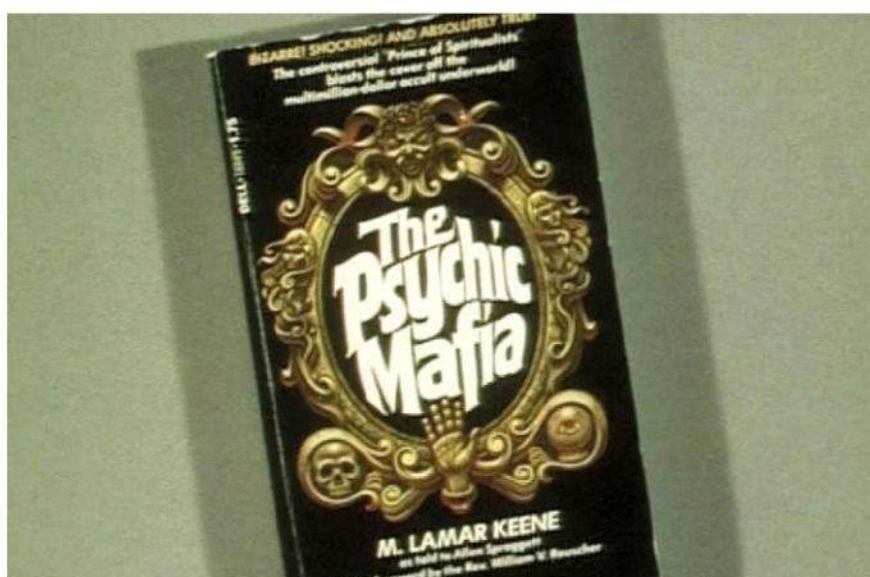
Back in London, the area round Belgraveia is home to several international embassies, but the HQ of the Spiritualist Association represents a different constituency entirely.<sup>7</sup> Psychic artist Coral Polge is in residence, channelling pictures of the departed and achieving some striking likenesses too, although she is face-to-face with a hall full of the bereaved relatives.<sup>8</sup>

In other rooms, mediums conduct 'sand reading' or believers' pets are treated by a psychic vet. Narrator Anna Ford advises us that years of training are necessary to perfect these skills, but she is contradicted by the spontaneous 19th century pioneers,



**FACING PAGE TOP:** One last round with Clarke. **FACING PAGE BOTTOM:** Kataragama, where devotees undertake the "pilgrimage of pain" **TOP:** Prof Fonseka recreates the amazing displays with science and secular volunteers. **CENTRE:** Californian volunteers at the Insight Centre, working themselves up to the fire walking climax of a motivational seminar. **ABOVE:** Dr Jearl Walker shows his ash-covered feet have suffered no permanent damage.





## DUNCAN'S SPIRITS CONSISTED OF CARD- BOARD, COATHANGERS AND OLD VESTS

who appear in Ford's potted history of the phenomenon.

We get Katie Fox, Margery Crandon's ectoplasmic tendrils,<sup>9</sup> the levitating Daniel Dunglas Home and the beguiling Florence Cook/Katie King – mediums championed by the eminent figures of their day such as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Sir William Crookes and Sir Oliver Lodge, often to the detriment of their scientific reputations.<sup>10</sup>

Next, Brazilian psychologist Luiz Gasperetto channels the Old Masters “under the scrutiny of the art department of Leeds Polytechnic”. The Yorkshire experts seem divided, citing the poor technique and regression to crayons and finger-paints.<sup>11</sup> In nearby Bradford, retired teacher Stella Horrocks reproduces the writing of various dead relatives and celebrities. Despite contributions from Virginia Wolf, Noel Coward, Charles Dickens and Jane Austen, no new best sellers have been generated.

Clarke returns with a long and pained “Well...” that certainly communicates his thoughts from beyond the grave. “Even if we do survive death, our skills don’t,” he complains. “And as a writer I’m not prepared to accept those terms.”

The programme changes focus, examining some well-publicised frauds. Katie Fox's sister Margaretta confessed to clicking her toes in séances, but there is no mention of her subsequent flip-flop over the confession.<sup>12</sup> Other mediums ended up in court, or were exposed, often by the crusading magician Harry Houdini. In 1944, Scottish medium Helen Duncan was “jailed for fraud” (in fact she was tried under the 1735 Witchcraft Act in a complex case involving naval secrets).<sup>13</sup> Her ‘spirits’ allegedly consisted of cardboard, coat-hangers and old vests.

We are also treated to a trip to a psychic holiday camp in Chesterfield, Indiana, with its ersatz mixture of Christian and – my apologies – “Red Indian” spiritual guidance. Reverend Louise Irvine describes the experience of vacationing amongst the shades of the departed.<sup>14</sup> We learn that in 1960 the *Psychic Observer* uncovered fraud at the camp, using an infrared camera to catch staff cavorting about pretending to be spirits. Former Chesterfield medium Lamar Keene demonstrates the secrets of his séance, including luminous floating trumpets and a vast filing system full of visitor's personal details. Another prop is the suitcase full of cash he took home after every season.

Later sting operations found further evidence of malpractice.<sup>15</sup> Keene, meanwhile,

TOP: Chesterfield Spiritualist Reverend Louise Irvine stresses the positive experience had by many attendees. CENTRE: ‘Spirit paintings’ at Camp Chesterfield depict life after parting... with your wallet. ABOVE: Camp psychic Lamar Keene confessed to a lucrative fraud in his tell-all memoirs.



survived at least one alleged assassination attempt after publishing his exposé *The Psychic Mafia*, and in later life dedicated himself to quietly undoing some of the harm he had caused, working with HIV/AIDS sufferers in Florida.<sup>16</sup>

Clarke chooses to leave us with the one final story that still makes him wonder. During WWII, Georgina Feakes's cousin appeared in a vision to inform her that his tank had been destroyed. He showed her a beautiful blue flower and said "Tell mum: Table Mountain", referring to his theft of a protected orchid there, a secret only she knew.<sup>17</sup>

Clarke, gesturing at the graves of Galle, asks us: "Will we ever know the truth, until we join these dead?"

### EPISODE 11: THE ROOTS OF EVIL

Again the programme makes adept use of Clarke's self-imposed exile, with exotic footage of Sri Lankan 'devil dancers' performing on Mount Lavina. In Ratnapura, belief in a darker magic is very much alive, Ford warns us, as a demon possesses a devil dancer and demands "mesmerised cockerels" in sacrifice. The ashes are hidden near the victim's home to complete the curse. In Unawatuna, the bewitched are brought back for exorcism (it must be lucrative playing both sides of this racket). A senior sorcerer catches the malignant entity on a thread and imprisons it in a bottle, which he then throws into the ocean.<sup>18</sup>

British Army Captain Alf Lewis recalls a West African soldier who was stricken with a similar 'Juju' during WWII. Just as the unfortunate man predicted, he slipped into an unresponsive trance and died.

In Charleston, South Carolina, the local doctors take the psychological effects of this 'root medicine' seriously: we hear how the roots are placed into tiny black bags, mixed with graveyard dust, hair or fingernails from the target, and feathers from a buzzard. The victim's name is written nine times with "dragon's blood ink" (a plant extract, I presume).

To the south, on Edisto Island, the sorry victims come to the graveyard caretaker Ben Parker to ask his spirits for release. The deceased souls require half a pint of whiskey and just nine cents in payment; there is no cost of living crisis in the spirit world.

It is interesting to compare the use of hair and fingernails with, for example, Native American and Islamic beliefs.<sup>19</sup> Clearly, across centuries and continents people have made use of similar materials to both curse and cure each other.

Psychiatrists like Mike Lampkin have to pick up the pieces. To do so, Lampkin "pretends" to be a root doctor himself, in order to take his patients through a traditional curative ritual. In doing so, to what extent does Lampkin actually *become* what he seeks to distance himself from? To what extent are all medicine men, magical



TOP: Margery Crandon and her nasal ectoplasm. CENTRE: Dramatic imagery of Sri Lanka's fiery devil dancers. ABOVE: "Root" expert and graveyard caretaker Ben Parker





**TOP:** Psychiatrist Dr Mike Lampkin races to relieve another victim of the sinister psychosomatic root. **CENTRE:** Did Mrs Ernest curse her own son over a business dispute? **BOTTOM:** At Longleat, Uri Geller works his psychic parlour tricks upon the cutlery of the Marquis of Bath

or otherwise, reliant upon their rituals?

Throughout this episode, Clarke cites the substantial medical evidence on curses, including several well authenticated cases from the 1965 *British Medical Journal*. The eminent authors appear here to discuss how curses can exacerbate psychosomatic symptoms such as asthma, skin irritation and paralysis, even leading in extreme cases to the patient's death. Today, the nocebo effect is well recognised by the medical mainstream; in one case a suicidal patient even managed to overdose on dummy sugar pills.<sup>20</sup>

Dr Roland Littlewood is up next to speculate on the biological mechanisms behind this effect, citing post-mortems where the victims' adrenal glands had been completely drained. This concept of stress induced 'adrenal fatigue' remains highly controversial. However, a sudden 'adrenal crisis' brought on by physical stress could potentially kill someone suffering from an underlying condition such as Addison's disease.<sup>21</sup> The symptoms, including 'fatigue' and 'sluggish movement', would certainly fit with the reports.

In our concluding case, Oklahoma businessman Finnis P Ernest dies from a "sophisticated version of voodoo" (by which they mean he was white and middle class). His short life was controlled in every detail by his domineering mother: his marriages, his business ventures, even his chronic asthma fell under her disturbing influence. A final visit to her home following a business dispute brought on a debilitating attack. As a result, he committed to selling his share of the nightclub they owned together, told his mother over the phone, and died an hour later.

## EPISODE 12: METAL-BENDING, MAGIC AND MIND OVER MATTER

Anna Ford opens by asking: "Are we all born with the power to move things with our minds?"

Yes! It's time for everybody's favourite Israeli spy/international showman extraordinaire: Uri Geller.

Geller's story begins back in 1973 with his first appearance on the *The Dimbleby Talk-in*, his fame and the craze for do-it-yourself spoon-bending spreading quickly on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>22</sup> Clarke shows us the front door key the young magician bent for him (our man had to wake up his brother to be let back in the house) and uses Geller to introduce the wider concept of psychokinesis (PK).

Personally, I think Geller is beyond accusations of mere fraud: it would be like spoiling Christmas, or pointing out the wires in an episode of *Thunderbirds*. Somehow, it's only the accuser who is cheapened. The BBC wrote a similarly sympathetic summary of Geller's exotic life last year, mentioning some recent turns in the limelight frustrating Brexit and rescuing the grounded cargo ship



## GELLER'S FAME AND THE CRAZE FOR SPOON-BENDING SPREAD QUICKLY

*Evergiven.*<sup>23</sup>

But PK wasn't just about entertainment, we learn, as we move on to archive footage of Russian experiments during the Cold War. Ford stumbles over the foreign syllables, but I believe one of the women mentioned is Soviet psychic Nina Kulagina, the apparent inspiration for a major plot line in the Netflix hit *Stranger Things*.<sup>24</sup>

Back in the USA we join SORRAT (the Society for Research on Rapport and Telekinesis), led by William E Cox and Dr John T Richards. Together they have designed a sealed 'mini lab' using a fish tank, sundry paper rings, balloons and a film camera. The footage of the rings jerkily linking and unlinking by themselves is reminiscent of *Bagpuss* or Tony Hart's stop-motion assistant *Morph*. Composer Alan Hawkshaw is canny enough to add the appropriate children's sound effects. Absurdity peaks with the appearance of a little cocktail umbrella in the arms of a tiny plastic knight.

SORRAT use the mini lab to magically transmit a letter to Clarke, and we watch him receive it back in Columbo. "I had no idea what this was all about," he insists tersely, before referring us to British sceptic Tony Cornell (who cropped up in the earlier poltergeist episode). Cornell easily recreates his own mock version of the mini lab with the single-frame photography techniques at his disposal.

Next, to Robert Smith lookalike Stephen North and his amiable physics professor John Hasted.<sup>25</sup> The following section is when the series finally descends into self-parody, with a surly Stephen glowering to camera as he triggers monophonic drones from within Hasted's glass laboratory. Hawkshaw must have taken himself down the dole office. It's all absolutely fabulous, spectacular nonsense.

Things arguably get worse with Dr Susan Blackmore claiming her psychic baby subjects are scoring "a little above chance" using a random number generator. Her personal website has a telling and very honest blog post from 2000: "Why I Gave Up Parapsychology".<sup>26</sup>

It's almost a relief when James Randi returns to give all this nonsense the kicking it richly deserves (my enemy's enemy and all that). He demonstrates his non-magical ability to bend keys using sleight of hand in front of a live audience. Then Randi takes us through Project Alpha,<sup>27</sup> his thorough debunking of aircraft tycoon James McDonnell's psychical laboratory at Washington



TOP: And this is what Uri did to Clarke's front door key. CENTRE: The absurd "mini-lab" and its stop-motion plastic knight. ABOVE: The series finally disappears up its hauntological backside with John Hasted and musical goth Steven North.





**TOP:** One of Susan Blackmore's psychic babies. **CENTRE:** It's almost a relief when miserable spoilsport Randi turns up to rubbish it all. **ABOVE:** Harry Price offers up his own reputation in ritual sacrifice on the Brocken in Germany's Harz Mountains.

University in St Louis. Randi protégées Steve Shaw and Mike Edwards initially amaze the researchers, before publicly confessing to the set-up. It's interesting to hear them describe some of their techniques, including identifying and sidelining the most skilled camera operator in the laboratory. Steve Shaw later turned professional (as stage magician Banachek); he's had an interesting life after a very difficult childhood.<sup>28</sup>

In conclusion, Clarke echoes our mentor Charles Fort when he warns us that "scientists are the easiest people to fool."

### EPISODE 13: THE VERDICT

Speaking with a mixture of pride and embarrassment from outside Sri Lanka's Arthur C Clarke Centre for Modern Technologies, our host begins to wrap up, explaining the importance of the paranormal to the country and its people. Even the centre's opening ceremony had to be held at an astrologically auspicious time. "I don't believe in it, but I find it rather charming," Clarke admits.

Laboriously, he counts his steps on the way to visit local numerologist and fortune teller KP Jinadasa, who predicts Clarke's success in matrimony. "Thanks for the warning," Clarke quips.<sup>29</sup>

Next up, a seemingly spare section revisiting Harry Price.<sup>30</sup> Ford digs briefly into Price's investigation of mediums<sup>31</sup> and haunted houses (most famously Borley Rectory), and we get a tour of his laboratory "full of the latest technology". Borley Rectory burns down, and Price cremates his own professional reputation in a bizarre publicity stunt on Mount Brocken, in which he fails to transform a "virgin he-goat" into a handsome youth.

Back to Clarke. "I've always tried to steer a course between scepticism and credulity," he reminds us, introducing his scoring system to rank the series paranormal phenomena. The results are reproduced on the facing page.

Before we have a chance to fall over his somewhat arbitrary conclusions, Clarke quickly introduces a couple of weird stories that didn't quite fit into any of his categories, and manages – just in time – to take us out on a bit of a high.

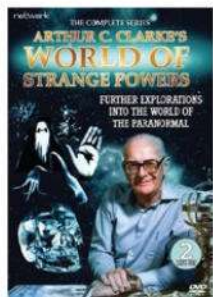
In Yealmpton, Devon, a deep and mysterious hole in the local churchyard vanishes as inexplicably as it first appeared: was it a puddle, an oil slick, or a portal to Hell?

And in France, British holidaymakers travel back in time to a rustic, old fashioned guesthouse, complete with local *gendarmes* in period capes. The bill comes to a meagre 19 francs (less than 10 per cent of the going rate). With the reputation of British holidaymakers abroad and across the decades at stake, they manage to tip an extra franc.

And then the last word goes to Clarke. How will he sum up everything we have been through?

"This ancient debate will never be settled," he warns us, before adding, much as Fort might say, "...there are fashions in parapsychology as in everything else. I wonder what strange powers we'll be arguing about 100 years from now..."

Let's hope FT is still here to host the discussion!



If you want to join in, I'd recommend buying the excellent 2015 Network DVD collection, which offers by far the best way to view all 13 episodes of this classic series. Available at: <https://networkonair.com>

## NOTES

1 There's a glowing portrait of this extraordinary Sri Lankan polymath here: [www.dailynews.lk/2021/11/06/features/263852/carlo-fonseka-far-sighted-professor](http://www.dailynews.lk/2021/11/06/features/263852/carlo-fonseka-far-sighted-professor)

2 [www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna48303534](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna48303534)

3 Kuda Bux would also become famous for his remarkable 'eyeless sight' performances, and as an inspiration to British magician Derren Brown, you can watch him in action here: <https://derrenbrown.co.uk/kuda-bux/>

4 [www.newscientist.com/article/2298528-watch-droplets-bounce-off-each-other-as-they-levitate-on-a-hot-plate/](http://www.newscientist.com/article/2298528-watch-droplets-bounce-off-each-other-as-they-levitate-on-a-hot-plate/)

5 For details of Walker's other practical demonstrations, see the episode summaries for his *Kinetic Carnival* at [www.imdb.com/title/tt8711502/](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt8711502/)

6 There's a useful survey here: [www.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/why-fire-walking-doesnt-burn-science-or-spirituality](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/why-fire-walking-doesnt-burn-science-or-spirituality)

7 They now seem to have moved to cheaper lodgings in Battersea: [www.sagb.org.uk/contact-us.htm](http://www.sagb.org.uk/contact-us.htm)

8 This fan page contains some biographical details on Coral along with examples of her work, including a somewhat harder to explain 'postal reading': [http://psychictruth.info/Medium\\_Coral\\_Polge.htm](http://psychictruth.info/Medium_Coral_Polge.htm)

9 Crandon's career and her debunking by Houdini are outlined here: [www.historynet.com/mina-crandon-harry-houdini-the-medium-and-the-magician/](http://www.historynet.com/mina-crandon-harry-houdini-the-medium-and-the-magician/)

10 For the Cook/Crookes case, see: [www.encyclopedia.com/science/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/cook-florence-eliza-1856-1904](http://www.encyclopedia.com/science/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/cook-florence-eliza-1856-1904)

11 Translation of his Portuguese wiki page here: [https://pt-m-wikipedia-org.translate.google.com/wiki/Luiz\\_Antonio\\_Gasparetto?\\_x\\_tr\\_sl=pt&\\_x\\_tr\\_tl=en&\\_x\\_tr\\_hl=en&\\_x\\_tr\\_pto=sc](https://pt-m-wikipedia-org.translate.google.com/wiki/Luiz_Antonio_Gasparetto?_x_tr_sl=pt&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=en&_x_tr_pto=sc)

12 A useful summary of the Fox sisters' career can be found here: [www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-fox-sisters-and-the-rap-on-spiritualism-99663697/](http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-fox-sisters-and-the-rap-on-spiritualism-99663697/)

13 [www.bbc.co.uk/history/scottishhistory/modern/oddities\\_modern.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/scottishhistory/modern/oddities_modern.shtml)

14 The camp is still going and they have a tribute to Louise here: <https://campchesterfield.net/tribute-rev-louise-e-irvine/>

15 <https://cdn.centerforinquiry.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/29/2002/03/22164753/p22.pdf>

16 [www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-10467705/Spiritual-medium-conman-duped-clients-inheritances-impersonated-dead-children.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-10467705/Spiritual-medium-conman-duped-clients-inheritances-impersonated-dead-children.html)

17 The story is markedly less impressive in the version told by Ian Stevenson in *Children Who Remember Previous Lives* (p.23) in which Georgina already knew of Owen's death.

18 Compare with the imprisoned djinn of *One Thousand and One Nights*.

19 See [www.facebook.com/Vox/videos/10210518469492138/](https://www.facebook.com/Vox/videos/10210518469492138/) and <https://aboutislam.net/counseling/ask-the-scholar/common-mistakes/dispose-fallen-hair-nails/>

20 [www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/what-is-the-nocebo-effect-5451823/](http://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/what-is-the-nocebo-effect-5451823/)

21 See [www.health.harvard.edu/blog/is-adrenal-fatigue-real-2018022813344](http://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/is-adrenal-fatigue-real-2018022813344); [www.uclahealth.org/endocrine-center/acute-adrenal-crisis](http://www.uclahealth.org/endocrine-center/acute-adrenal-crisis)

22 <https://www2.bfi.org.uk/films-tv-people/4ce2b87382ffe>

23 Israeli 'psychic' Uri Geller still baffling fans at 75 [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-59609232](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-59609232)

24 [www.mysteriouspeople.com/Nina\\_Kulagina.htm](http://www.mysteriouspeople.com/Nina_Kulagina.htm); <https://timeline.com/nina-kulagina-spy-psychic-5644ac54066d>

25 His *Guardian* obituary soft-pedals Hasted's credulity in favour of his love of communism and folk music: [www.theguardian.com/news/2002/sep/09/guardianobituaries](http://www.theguardian.com/news/2002/sep/09/guardianobituaries)

26 [www.susanblackmore.uk/](http://www.susanblackmore.uk/)

27 See below under 'psychokinete' for Randi's summary of Project Alpha <https://web.randi.org/p-encyclopedia-of-claims.html>; for an even weirder postscript see: [www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp96-00788r001100360001-1](http://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp96-00788r001100360001-1) in which a panicky CIA seeks to differentiate its psychic research from Randi's shenanigans.

28 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banachek>

29 I have previously discussed Clarke's private homosexuality (FT411:44). It is important to note that he always denied the more unpleasant and legally unsubstantiated accusations about his life in Sri Lanka; see for example [www.independent.co.uk/news/the-mysterious-sri-lankan-world-of-arthur-c-clarke-1142640.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/the-mysterious-sri-lankan-world-of-arthur-c-clarke-1142640.html) and [www.independent.co.uk/news/media/press/notw-editor-spiked-paedophilia-scoop-on-arthur-c-clarke-for-fear-of-murdoch-7920816.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/press/notw-editor-spiked-paedophilia-scoop-on-arthur-c-clarke-for-fear-of-murdoch-7920816.html)

30 See [www.harrypricewebsite.co.uk/index.html](http://www.harrypricewebsite.co.uk/index.html) for a host of related resources, including details on both Borley and the Brocken incident.

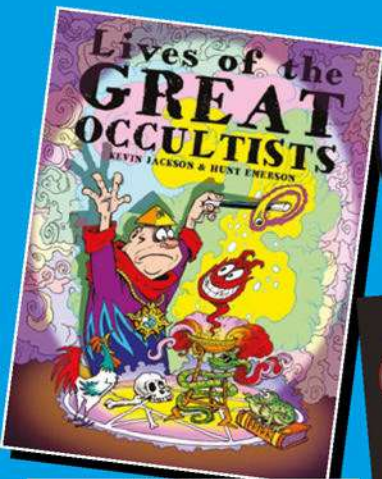
31 Including Rudi Schneider, who has the dubious distinction of being accused of orgasming during seances; see Peter Underwood's *Into the Occult*, p.214 in the ebook.

❖ RYAN SHIRLOW is a Northern Irish forteman, writer and musician. His album *Ullstair University - Vol.1* is available on Woodford Halse via [bandcamp.com](https://bandcamp.com)

## CLARKE'S SCALE OF PROBABILITIES

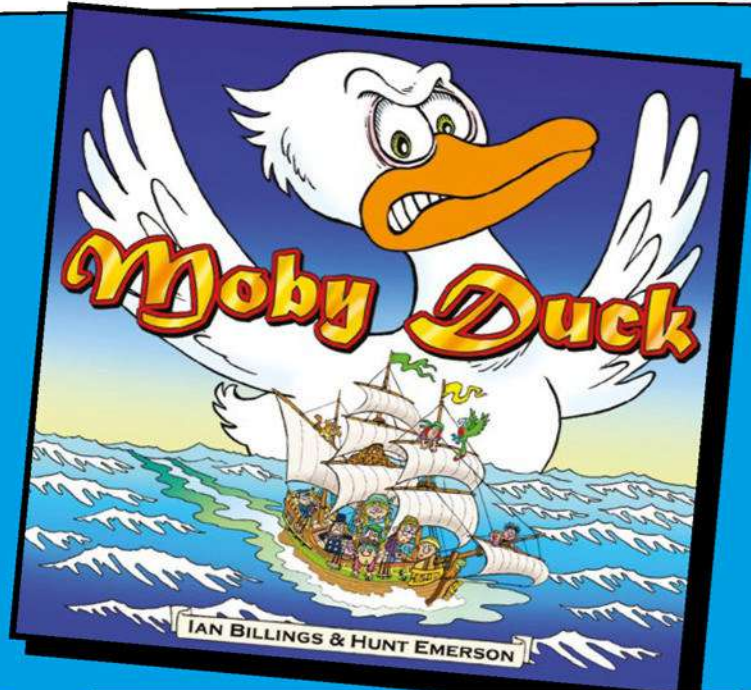
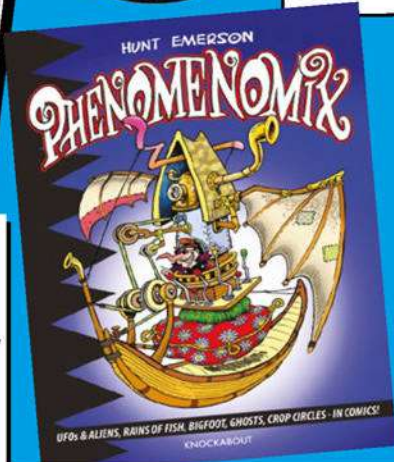






# LARGE COW

the Online Shop for HUNT EMERSON



## LIVES OF THE GREAT OCCULTISTS

120 pages in colour, including Dr. Dee, Giordano Bruno, Isobel Gowdie, William Blake, WB Yeats, Faust, Jack Parsons, Kenneth Anger, Madame Blavatski, and - repeatedly - Aleister Crowley. **£12.99**

## PHENOMENOMIX

240 pages in full colour. Collecting most of my pages from Fortean Times - tales of the unexplained, true, half true and totally invented. **£22.99**

## TWO NEW BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

### MOBY DUCK & TROUBLE AT THE DINOSAUR CAFE

40 pages, full colour. Wild verse-stories with double page spread cartoons.

**£9.99 each**

**NB: NOT Fortean!**



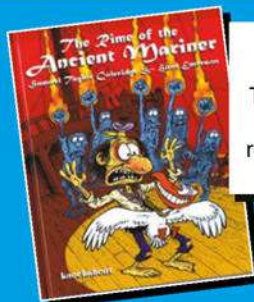
## GREAT OCCULTISTS - 4 SIGNED PRINTS

Featured in my *Great Occultists* book, these portraits are A3 size signed prints, great for framing or an enviable birthday gift! A limited set of prints, only available from Largecow.com **£25.00**

## CALCULUS CAT/ HOT JAZZ SPECIAL DEAL!!



A special deal on two books. **CALCULUS CAT** (usually £10) and **HOT JAZZ** (usually £12) for just **£17!!**

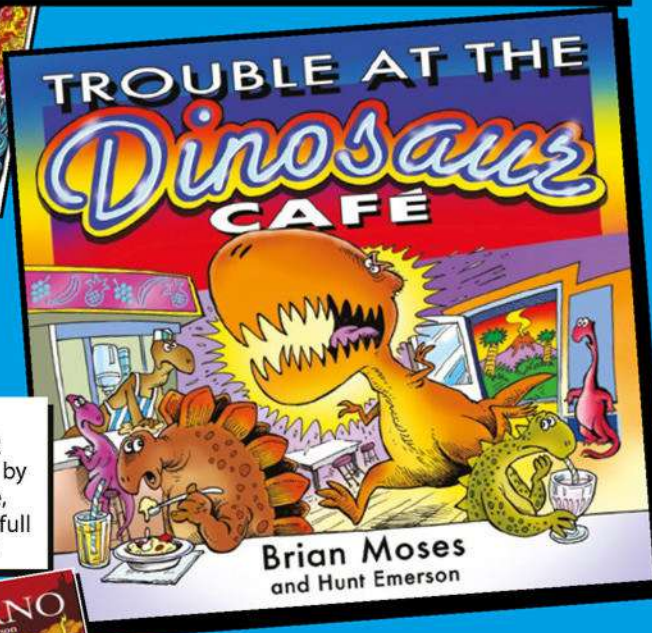
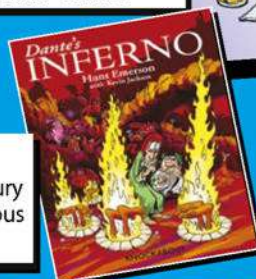


## THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER

The great narrative ballad by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, rendered as a comic book full of awful puns. **£11.99**

## DANTE'S INFERNO

The noble and mysterious 14th Century poem by Dante Alighieri made hilarious by Emerson and Jackson. **£11.99**



**Brian Moses and Hunt Emerson**

**\*ALL BOOKS ARE SIGNED!  
\*MANY HAVE SKETCHES!  
\*PERSONAL DEDICATIONS ARRANGED!  
\*FREE STICKERS ETC.  
USUALLY INCLUDED!!**

# WWW.LARGE COW.COM

**BOOKS. ORIGINAL ARTWORK. CARTOONS. COMICS PAGES. PRINTS. FREE GIFTS.**





## Celebrity grave-spotting

**TED HARRISON** finds a relaxing stroll around an ordinary churchyard can throw up some unexpected finds

Some people collect autographs as a hobby. There are also those who hunt down the famous and take selfies with them. Other folk, however, might prefer the more peaceful pursuit of celebrity grave-spotting. The focus is not on the great monuments and shrines to kings and saints in cathedrals and abbeys, but on the unexpected finds in ordinary churchyards and municipal cemeteries.

Recently an historian friend in Lerwick, Shetland, was taking us on a tour of the war graves in the town cemetery. He told us the often poignant stories he had researched of ordinary people who had died in the course of two world wars. Quite unexpectedly we found ourselves in front of the grave of Pilot Officer GG Macaulay. It was a standard service grave. There was no mention of his civilian fame, yet George Macaulay was a sporting star and one with a unique distinction, having taken a wicket with the first ball he bowled in test cricket! We had identified a celebrity grave.

A quiet country drive, stopping off to explore an old church, is a simple pursuit. Sometimes grave-spotters pause to picnic in a churchyard, not through any macabre interest in being among the dead, but because churchyards are quiet, peaceful and refreshing places to be. Seated on a memorial bench or under the shade of an ancient tree they might have some interesting company. At Winchelsea in Sussex you can picnic with Spike Milligan. At Sutton Courtenay, Oxfordshire, you can have lunch with former Prime Minister



### *At Winchelsea in Sussex you can picnic with Spike Milligan*

Herbert Asquith and Eric Blair, better known as author George Orwell – though none of them, sadly, is in a position to contribute much to the conversation.

There is less fun to be had in searching places famed as locations where the rich and famous foregathered in death. Where's the challenge? Highgate Cemetery in London, for instance, is of minor interest, even though such major names from the past as Karl Marx, Christina Rossetti, John Galsworthy and George Eliot are to be found there in the company of modern celebs such as Jeremy Beadle, Douglas Adams, Bob Hoskins and Corin Redgrave.

The fun is in the looking. A grave-spotter might discover a reference to an obscure grave and decide to hunt it down. Large municipal cemeteries provide a real challenge. For instance, the French philosopher and mystic Simone Weil, who died in the UK in 1943, is buried in Bybrook Cemetery in Ashford, Kent; she lies among lines of

long-forgotten Ashfordians and is not easy to find without a guide. Writer Joseph Conrad's grave is similarly difficult to track down in a large secular cemetery in north Canterbury, Kent. The search is not made easier by the fact that the headstone gives his full name of 'Joseph Teador Conrad Korzeniowski'. It takes less time to find the grave of the reputed (and disputed) Princess Tatiana, daughter of the last Tsar of Russia, in Lydd town cemetery in Kent. The grave is of a very distinctive design and relatively easy to spot.

Some celebrity graves are still regularly visited and tended. Visitors to St Enodoc in Cornwall often make a point of paying the late poet laureate John Betjeman a call. There are people who make a deliberate pilgrimage to St Nicholas, Moreton, Dorset, the resting place of TE Lawrence (of Arabia), such is his enduring charisma. Winston Churchill is on the itinerary of tourists visiting Blenheim Palace. And St Wulstan's Roman Catholic Church in Little Malvern is well known to music-lovers who come to see where composer Sir Edward Elgar decomposes.

The grave of pop star Billy Fury at Mill Hill Cemetery, London, is easily identified if visited around mid-April, for every year the pop

LEFT: 'Pip's Graves' in the churchyard of St James, Cooling, Kent.

legend's birthday is celebrated with new arrangements of flowers.

Finding a little-known celebrity grave in a genuinely remote churchyard is however a particular delight. By St Aidan's church, Thockington, which stands in solitude on a hill off a narrow obscure lane in deepest rural Northumberland, can be found the grave of Lord Beveridge. His legacy is found everywhere, for he is known as 'the father' of the National Health Service and the modern British welfare state, even though his headstone stands in a remote corner of northern England. Of equal remoteness is a grave at Cross Kirk, Eshaness, Shetland. Buried there is a man known as Johnnie Notions who was an important 18th century pioneer of smallpox vaccination.

A variation on the theme of celebrity grave-hunting is to identify a burial ground made famous in literature. For example, the chilling description of the marshland graveyard given by Dickens when Pip encounters the convict Magwitch in *Great Expectations* was based on a real burial ground. St James, Cooling, Kent, was well known to the author and can be identified from the book by the distinctive row of children's graves he described.

A celebrity grave need not be one bearing the name of a notable worthy. There is, for instance, a memorial tablet to the last Cornish speaker, Dolly Pentreath, in Paul, Cornwall. Or there is 'Betty's Grave', at a crossroads near Bibury, Gloucestershire. She was buried at a crossroads, outside the village boundary, after being executed as a witch.

But be warned: her ghost allegedly still haunts the scene...

♦ **TED HARRISON** is an artist, writer and former BBC religious affairs correspondent. He is a regular contributor to FT.



## The Quatermass Experiment at 70

**JON DEAR** celebrates 70 years of Nigel Kneale's most famous creation.

This July sees the 70th anniversary of the broadcast of *The Quatermass Experiment*, and with it a revolution in the possibilities of television. Writer Nigel Kneale and producer Rudolph Cartier delivered an enduring SF classic – but it was also the first real example of what we would now describe as event television.

The character of Professor Bernard Quatermass and the three pioneering serials of the 1950s in which he appeared would have a profound and lasting influence, not just on TV but on the wider cultural landscape. The three serials – *The Quatermass Experiment* (1953), *Quatermass II* (1955) and *Quatermass and the Pit* (1958/59) – each present a different take on the same basic scenario: an alien invasion. They weren't the first science fiction stories shown by the BBC, either adapted or original, but they were the first to really stretch the boundaries of what could be achieved by the still largely live medium of television. Kneale never really saw the stories as science fiction: for him, they were contemporary thrillers, although painted on a canvas just a bit larger than the familiar planet on which they were set.

The character of Bernard Quatermass represented Kneale's distillation of the ideals of the Post War consensus. His first name comes from Bernard Lovell, director of the Jodrell Bank Observatory, while the distinctive surname was taken from a search of the London Telephone Directory. An idealist, Quatermass represents all that is good in the application of science to benefit humanity. We continually see him placed in situations that find him way out of his depth – but



LEFT: The professor prepares to examine the astronaut Carroon in *The Quatermass Experiment*. FACING PAGE: This September will see a live reading from Alexandra Palace.

the whole of humanity is out of its depth and Quatermass is the only one with a chance of making a positive difference. Indeed the first serial concludes with him appealing to the latent humanity in the alien creature to destroy itself before it destroys mankind.

In that most British of ways, Quatermass was created out of crisis and improvisation. There was a scheduling gap on Saturday evenings over the summer of 1953 and the BBC turned to its two-man writing team of George Kerr and Nigel Kneale. Kerr, it turned out, was on holiday. As Kneale explained to his biographer Andy Murray: "They said 'for God's sake write something, because the programme is empty over the summer. Please, somebody think of something'. So I did."

What Kneale created – initially entitled 'Bring Something Back' and then, briefly, 'The Begotten' – was a contemporary scientific thriller. The British Experimental Rocket Group, led by Professor Bernard Quatermass, sends Earth's first manned flight into space. Something goes wrong and they lose contact with the rocket, which veers off course and travels far further than planned. Eventually, the rocket crash-lands back on Earth. Quatermass and his team gain

### Quatermass was created out of crisis and improvisation

access to the craft only to find that two of the three astronauts are missing, even though their space suits are intact, and no one has entered the capsule. Victor Carroon, the remaining crew member, is conscious but unresponsive. On examination, his fingerprints have changed, and he appears to be able to speak German despite not previously knowing the language. However, one of the missing crewmen was German... With growing horror, Quatermass realises that contact with some form of extraterrestrial intelligence has caused the three men to become one, and Carroon is still changing, mutating into something totally alien.

Kneale's writing also contains a unique contrast between the prosaic and the fantastical. Witness the crowd that gathers in the aftermath of the rocket crash. Miss Wilde's house is all but destroyed, yet her only concern is for her cat, Henry. A drunk wanders around telling everyone

what a marvellous job they're doing. And all a few feet from the rocket and the alien horrors it contains. The penultimate episode features a scene where a rapidly mutating Carroon lurks on one side of a lake in St James's Park, while on the other a young couple discuss how many children they might have when they're married. For Kneale, grounding the extraordinary within the well observed minutiae of human life makes the story all the more believable, and therefore all the more horrific.

In producer Rudolph Cartier, the Quatermass serials had someone who was willing to push the limits of the primitive technology available at the BBC's Alexandra Palace studios. The first story uses the techniques of found footage, fake documentary and fictional film within its narrative; for the majority of people watching, this would have been the first time they'd experienced such concepts. Sadly, only the first two episodes survive for us to enjoy today.

Although it's a coincidence that 1953 is also the anniversary of the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, that event would be fundamental to the success of *The Quatermass Experiment*. It was the first time cameras had been able to cover a coronation and saw a large uptake in the number of people buying or renting televisions. A young, female monarch became a symbol of a more progressive, hopeful future: it was a good time to make new and modern television. There was definitely something in the air in 1953. Arthur C Clarke published *Childhood's End*, a story about interventionist aliens taking over Earth because mankind can't be trusted, while John Wyndham's *The Kraken Awakes* concerns



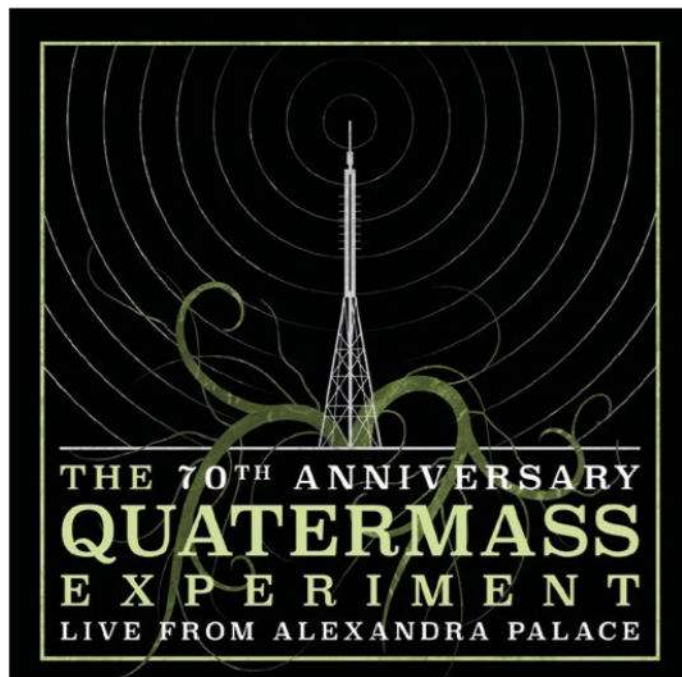


an invasion by submarine extraterrestrials who seize the oceans and thus bring civilisation crashing down by crippling international trade.

*The Quatermass Experiment* was an unqualified success. Hammer Films would soon buy the film rights from the BBC (without consulting Kneale, something he never forgave them for). Kneale and Cartier soon began work on their celebrated adaptation of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1954), however it wouldn't be too long before the world once again had need of the services of Professor Quatermass.

It was now 1955 and Independent Television was launching. To counter this threat, the BBC killed off one of the central characters of its popular radio serial *The Archers* on ITV's opening night, and over October and November of that year they broadcast *Quatermass II*. The story once again revolved around an alien invasion, but this time it has already taken place over a year earlier. The aliens now hold positions of power in government. Quatermass discovers the truth, but no one will believe him.

It's a darker and more complex tale than its predecessor, playing on the Cold War paranoia of the 1950s, with secret research centres and cordoned-off areas turning Britain's green and pleasant land into an uncanny landscape, equal parts bureaucratic and autocratic. Quatermass (this time played by John Robinson, as original actor Reginald Tate had died) is largely alone and on the run, aided by occasional companions who tend to meet unfortunate fates. This is Kneale at his most political, with the emotionless and brainwashed humans as suggestive of a Communist takeover as of an alien invasion. *Quatermass II* was also sadly prophetic. The strange complex Quatermass discovers at Wimmerden Flats may have been a fictional alien breeding ground masquerading as a synthetic food processing plant, but it looks very similar to a nuclear power plant. And two years later came Britain's biggest nuclear disaster. The fire at Windscale, Britain's first nuclear reactor and a site used for research into the manufacture of atomic weapons, was covered up



on the orders of Prime Minister Harold Wilson. Later investigation showed that there had been several radiation leaks prior to the fire. It's estimated that between 100 and 240 people died as a result of an accident the Government would barely acknowledge.

The serial also has some brutal imagery, such as a picnicking family being machine-gunned to death for not leaving a beach when ordered to by guards. The extensive use of location filming gives the whole production an epic quality only partly let down by the variable quality of its cast and a poorly realised final episode. Landing a rocket on an alien-infested meteor turned out to be a job too far for the available resources.

A month before the broadcast of *Quatermass II*, Hammer released *The Quatermass Xperiment*. Kneale had next to no involvement in the story and was not a fan of the final product. Nevertheless, the release of this and *Quatermass 2* in 1957 considerably raised the Professor's profile in the US. Indeed, this was how filmmaker John Carpenter first encountered Kneale, who was a huge influence on his own work; numerous Kneale references can be found throughout Carpenter's films, and the two eventually collaborated, largely unhappily, on *Halloween III* in 1982.

The third and final Quatermass

serial of the 1950s is the best remembered and arguably Kneale's greatest achievement. Broadcast over the Christmas and New Year period of 1958-59, *Quatermass and the Pit* is simply one of the greatest TV series ever produced. It's a masterpiece of concept, plotting, design and acting. Workmen on a building site dig up a skull that proves to be millions of years old. Scientists are excited by a potential 'missing link' discovery, but when a large metal object is discovered even further down than the skull, the mystery encompasses near unimaginable depths. Kneale is not just digging under London, he's excavating the human psyche. We discover the origins of ghosts, hauntings and the Devil himself. The entire nature of humanity is redefined as it's revealed we're the results of Martian genetic experimentation. If the first Quatermass story was of alien invasion, and the second a full-on takeover, then this one has the Professor arriving six million years too late.

The overriding theme is the dangers of racism, which is discovered to be alien to humans and introduced by the Martians. We learn how the civilisations on Mars destroyed themselves and how, if we're not careful, mankind will make the same mistake and Earth will become "our second

dead planet".

It would be a long while before Kneale returned to Quatermass and the four-part serial broadcast on ITV in 1979 was a very different beast. It is set in a dystopian future with Earth attacked by an alien entity that harvests the young, and Kneale suggests that intergenerational conflict will ultimately destroy the world. In typical Kneale fashion, it ends with Quatermass and his granddaughter sacrificing themselves to save the planet, by detonating a nuclear bomb in middle England...

There would be two more productions – *The Quatermass Memoirs* in 1996 for Radio 3, part documentary, part dramatisation, with Andrew Keir recreating his role from Hammer's *Quatermass and the Pit*, and a 2005 live remake of *The Quatermass Experiment* – but neither made much of an impact.

It's hard to overstate the influence of Quatermass on popular culture, including on generations of writers and filmmakers such as John Carpenter, Stanley Kubrick and Stephen King, and his shadow falls over a vast number of television series and films, among them *The X-Files*, *The League of Gentlemen* and *Doctor Who*. Through Quatermass, Nigel Kneale showed the best of humanity, demonstrating that while we can't unlearn things, it's always better to know – even if you don't like the answers.

For more on Nigel Kneale, see **FT218:28-29** and **418:28-35**.

#### FURTHER READING

Andy Murray, *Into the Unknown: The Fantastic Life of Nigel Kneale* (2nd ed), Head Press, 2017.

Neil Snowden (ed), *We Are The Martians: The Legacy of Nigel Kneale*, PS Publishing, 2017.

Toby Hadoke's long-awaited book *The Quatermass Files Volume 1* will be published this year by Ten Acre Films.

◆ **JON DEAR** is a writer on TV and film, hosts *BERGCAST: The Nigel Kneale Podcast*. He is producing a live reading of *The Quatermass Experiment* at Alexandra Palace on 9 Sept. For details visit: [www.alexandrapalace.com/whats-on/the-quatermass-experiment/](http://www.alexandrapalace.com/whats-on/the-quatermass-experiment/)



# THE WORLD OF STRANGE PHENOMENA **ForteanTimes**

SUBSCRIBE NOW AND NEVER MISS AN ISSUE OF THE GALAXY'S BEST JOURNAL OF STRANGE PHENOMENA

For anyone with a sense of adventure, an enquiring mind and a love of the weird and wonderful...

Every month, **Fortean Times** takes you on an incredible journey into the unknown where you'll encounter some of the most fantastic phenomena on Earth... and sometimes beyond.

## GREAT REASONS TO SUBSCRIBE

- **SAVE ON THE COVER PRICE!**
- **13 Issues delivered to your door (postage included)\***
- **13 Issues available on mobile/tablet to keep on your device\*\***
- **Every issue delivered before it's available to buy in shops**
- **Enjoy a 10% discount on all merchandise and books in our shop**

\*Print and bundle subscribers

\*\* Digital and bundle subscribers



**SUBSCRIBE NOW**

ORDER ONLINE AT  
**SHOP.FORTEANTIMES.COM/FT434P**

EMAIL US AT  
**HELLO@METROPOLIS.CO.UK**

OR CALL **020 8752 8195**  
QUOTING FT434P







## Mind-altering exploration

The UK's most erudite writer on drugs and altered states of consciousness reveals how scientists' personal experimentation led to the development of psychology, says **Andy Roberts**

### Psychonauts

**Drugs and the Making of the Modern Mind**

Mike Jay

Yale University Press 2023

Hb, 359pp, £20, ISBN 9780300257946

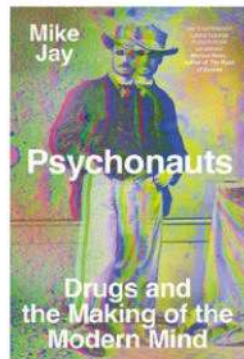
In the 21st century we take drugs, prescribed and controlled, for granted. Geographical, political and legal variations notwithstanding, they are a chemical backdrop to our lives, offering healing and entertainment as well as addiction and death. Most psychoactive drugs are controlled by law and it is very difficult for the enthusiastic amateur or professional researcher to test them on themselves and retain any credibility.

This was not always so. Mike Jay explains that when the Royal Society was founded in the 17th century at the dawn of the Age of Enlightenment, their motto *Nulius in Verba* ('on the word of no one') was a green light for those early psychonauts who "placed experiment at the heart of the scientific revolution".

In *Psychonauts* Jay, arguably the UK's most erudite writer on drugs and altered states of consciousness, traces the course of these experiments with mind-altering substances, experiments which, he claims, led to the development of psychology and the disciplines surrounding it. Early psychonauts (a term coined in 1970 by Albert Hofmann's complex friend Ernst Junger) included Humphrey Davy who, after experimenting with nitrous oxide, realised a new vocabulary was required to adequately describe its effect. "I feel like the sound of a harp," noted one of his friends unscientifically whilst others experienced extreme euphoria or inexplicable paroxysms of laughter. The effects of drugs on the

mind clearly deserved scientific study and discussion to examine what light they could shed on the conscious and the subconscious.

But the debate wasn't exclusively scientifically orientated and Jay excels in teasing out the psychonauts who experimented as much for pleasure as for what it told them about the workings of the mind. The Romantic poets experimented recreationally with opium and hashish, the effects on their perceptions and imagination being echoed in their poetry as well as their often flamboyant lifestyles. The mind became a labyrinth to explore whilst under the influence and excited psychonauts marvelled at



what they found. One early hashish eater, recalling the effects of a gram of that drug, was amazed at the perceptual effects, but understood the same dose could affect people differently, thus: "If excited by an overdose of hashish or opium, a savage Muslim becomes an assassin, a Malay is seized by an amok frenzy, whereas in the same situation, a scholarly, educated European doctor carries out observations on himself." This may be one of the first iterations of Leary's concept of "set and setting".

Many discoveries from the use of drugs were crucial to the underpinnings of modern psychology. Freud's use of cocaine, for inst-

*"I feel like the sound of a harp," noted one of his friends unscientifically*

ance, influenced the development of psychoanalysis; William James's experiments with nitrous oxide led him to aspire to "a new psychology that could encompass mystical experiences". But as the 19th century progressed scientists became less interested in the subjective and intangible experiences offered by drugs, and hallucinatory states once referred to as visionary were now reframed by the scientific establishment as errors in mental functioning. The term hallucination was now cognate not with glimpses of other realities but with mental illness and insanity.

Interest in drug-induced mystical revelations persisted though, and their exploration gained a new lease of life with the formation in 1882 of the Society for Psychical Research, dedicated to studying phenomena "on or outside the boundaries of science". The SPR, like James, were sceptical of the rise of purely materialistic psychology and continued to use different classes of drugs to delve into the subliminal mind. One SPR stalwart, Scottish chemist William Ramsey, was an enthusiastic user of anaesthetic gases, at one point getting somewhat carried away and declaring, "I had reached the true solution of the secret of the universe", an illusion many LSD takers will be all too familiar with!

And so it continued. That drugs such as opium, hashish and nitrous oxide could stimulate euphoria, without the user

being able to explain exactly why, suggested the possibility of a location in the brain which could be activated by drugs as and when required. But euphoria has its opposite, and the darker side of drugs such as cocaine and morphine soon became apparent, Louis Lewin noting, "In morphia are combined a blessing and a curse", while *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson (no stranger to coca wine and other stimulants) sensationalised the potential dangers of personality-altering drugs.

Jay notes that William James's 1902 book, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, placed heavy emphasis on the use of ether or nitrous oxide to "stimulate the mystical consciousness in an extraordinary degree". James suggested that these drug-induced mystical experiences be studied not as evidence for other planes of existence but for their reality on their own terms, which is the beginning of much subsequent psychedelic drug research. Moving into the 20th century Jay introduces the characters who would underpin the psychedelic era, Aldous Huxley, Gerald Heard, Allan Bennett and more left-field characters such as Aleister Crowley. The political and medical establishments slowly but surely cracked down on freelance drug investigation but the seeds had been sown and the genii could not be put back in the bottle.

Dense with fascinating information, some of it obscure, all of it well referenced, *Psychonauts* is an essential addition to any psychonaut's library. As Jay says in his closing line: "We are, in Sigmund Freud's phrase, pros- thetic gods; the meaning of drugs lies not in the substances but in our selves".

★★★★★



# Wonderful things

**Paul Sieveking** delights in a lavishly illustrated exploration of Cabinets of Curiosity

## Kunstkammer

**Early Modern Art and Curiosity Cabinets in the Holy Roman Empire**

Jeffrey Chipps Smith

Reaktion Books 2022

Hb, 336pp, £35, ISBN 9781789146127

The *Kunstkammer* (plural *Kunst-kammern*), or (more fully) the *Kunst- und Wunderkammer*, or cabinet of curiosity, was a world in miniature, an assembly of the recondite and bizarre, which demonstrated the continuities



between the treasures of art and the wonders of nature. Actually, the term “cabinet of curiosity” is misleading; the *Kunstkammer* could be a chamber or sequence of rooms, which might well contain actual cabinets containing categories of exhibits. It represented a crucial stage in the history of taste before the advent of modern museums in the Age of Enlightenment, when collections were separated out into natural history, fine art, mechanical wonders, anomalies, and so forth.

In theory, *Kunstkammern* were universal or encyclopædic collections gathered for the owner’s enjoyment, edification and utility. The first ones were established in the mid-16th century in Vienna and Munich and soon in other towns across the Holy Roman Empire, mostly formed by powerful ruling families drawing initially from existing possessions, supplemented as unfamiliar objects became available, particularly from newly

discovered regions of the world. One precedent was ecclesiastical treasuries, which assembled a diverse range of objects such as reliquaries or *mirabilia* (such as a wooden splinter from the True Cross or a section of the rope Judas used to hang himself) and diverse objects donated by the faithful. The *Kunstkammern* were organised in a system involving *naturalia*, *artificialia*, *antiquitates*, *scientifica*, *exotica* and *mirabilia*.

This superb, lavishly illustrated tome by Jeffrey Chipps-Smith has chapters on the Munich cabinet of the Wittelsbachs; Schloss Ambras of Archduke Ferdinand; the Dresden cabinet of the Albrecht Wettins; the cabinet of Rudolf II in Prague; and the *Kunstkammern* in Graz, Stuttgart and Kassel. Hardly any have survived intact; most have been dispersed by wars, changing tastes, economic needs, and dispersal by inheritance. They can only be imagined by studying inventories. The author evokes his seven chosen *Kunstkammern* through official court records, visitors’ accounts and extant objects. Photographs of astonishing objects of vertu punctuate the pages – a sensual treat.

To give some idea of the extent of a typical *Kunstkammer*, a 1598 inventory of Duke Albrecht’s in Munich contains 3,407 entries comprising more than 6,000 objects, not including prints, drawings, coins and medals. The collection stressed the duke’s magnificence, his territorial identity and, more broadly, his aesthetic tastes. He was keen on natural abnormalities such as malformed deer antlers, a piece of wood that grew around a horse spur, a tree that sprouted through an animal’s skull, two calves’ heads with four and three eyes respectively, and a picture of Siamese twins. There was a profusion of silver-gilt goldsmith’s objects, vessels studded with emeralds, rubies and diamonds, objects fashioned from coral, lapis lazuli and other precious minerals.

★★★★★

## Victorian Alchemy

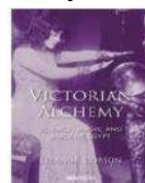
**Science, Magic and Ancient Egypt**

Eleanor Dobson

UCL Press 2022

Pb, 276pp, £25, ISBN 9781787358492

*Victorian Alchemy* focuses on the late 19th century when interest in ancient Egypt was burgeoning – long before the “Tutmania” of the 1920s. Spurred on by archaeological finds and intersecting with the occult revival as well as the growth of “weird fiction”, Egypt was as captivating for the scientist as for the Spiritualist. Ancient Egypt was tied to the origins of ritual magic and at the same time revered for its engineering and scientific knowledge (the pyramids, mathematics, astronomy). As a society that was acutely aware of its own advance-



ment and technological progress, Victorian Britain looked back to ancient Egypt and saw itself.

Dobson’s central focus is ancient Egypt’s literary presence. The examples she discusses could all be categorised as “speculative fiction”, from E Nesbit’s short stories to well-known examples like H Rider Haggard’s *She*. A key strength of her approach is her focus on lesser-known authors of the period, including Marie Hutcheson, whose 1889 short story “The Paraschites” melded ancient Egypt and the occult in a classic illustration of the ethereal boundaries between science and the supernatural.

Some of the more outré theories of Egyptian influence are covered (Martians building the Sphinx), including the suggestion that the ancient Egyptians had harnessed electricity, an idea that appeared in the works of Theosophist Helena Blavatsky and novelist Marie Corelli. Egypt was celebrated in print, on film and in stone: London’s Egyptian Hall, constructed in 1812, would host many of the performances that bolstered Britain’s 19th-century Spiritualist movement. Dobson’s exploration of Egypt’s influence on Spiritualist practices is fascinating: the Ouija board, for example, was also termed the “Egyptian luck board”. She is clear, though, that the cultural obsession with ancient Egypt was

not without its problems, carrying with it the baggage of a colonial system that had facilitated the accumulation of countless artefacts and cultural assumptions.

What is most striking about many of Dobson’s literary examples is how the idea of Egypt could collapse time and space for contemporaries, whether through the pages of a book like HG Wells’s *The Time Machine*, or by encountering a mummy’s hand on an X-ray. The allure of ancient Egypt, and the hope that it will be more fully elucidated via technology, shows little sign of slowing (witness, for example, the 2020 project that made Leeds City Museum’s Nesyamun mummy “speak” using a CT scanner and 3D printing).

*Victorian Alchemy* encourages us to question the origins of, and motivations behind, this fascination: why does the spell that ancient Egypt cast on Victorian society continue to hold us in its grasp?

Jennifer Wallis

★★★★★

## The Petroglyphs of Mu

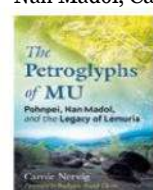
**Pohnpei, Nan Madol and the legacy of Lemuria**

Carole Nervig

Bear & Co 2022

Pb, 368pp, £19.99, ISBN 9781591434474

In the 1990s, after a chance bush fire on the island of Pohnpei in the Federated States of Micronesia, already known in esoteric circles for the water-filled site of Nan Madol, Carole Nervig discovered Pohnpei, an area strewn with basaltic boulders.



The “arranged” boulders, many of which, to her, resemble male and female genitalia, giant clams and perhaps even Ganesha, are covered in petroglyphs and cup marks. Much of her evidence is shown in 35 good colour plates, taken at the time, with poor black and white grainy repetitions throughout the text.

For most of the book she takes each petroglyph and favourably compares them with global siblings (and in a single case, a Martians one) in an eclectic approach that ultimately returns these universal symbols back to the chiselings found in James Churchward’s *Lost Continent of*





Mu. Her text varies, alternating chapters giving very detailed descriptions of her personal “journey” as she was “led” to Pohnpei and then eventually to write the book, and more descriptive and illustrative ones where explanations of strange phenomena (often involving interdimensional portals and/or persons from Pleiades) associated with glyph sites involve numerous attempts to blind both reader and writer with pseudoscience. The (perhaps interdimensional) inverse square law between the use of italics in a text and credibility is a universal constant, as is the use of “looks like” and “sounds like”; there is much MU-sing and italicisation on the use of that syllable in place and personal names.

Her work has essentially been a solo effort and she bemoans that the lush regrowth in the area now inhibits further examination of the boulders – though Lidar would penetrate the foliage and reveal the extent of the site, the number of boulders and confirm/refute her suggestions of a circular configuration – a South Sea Stonehenge? – and astronomical and geographical alignments.

Her book will bring comfort and re-enforcement to any believer of Churchward, but perhaps remind others to continue to speculate: did he write it all as an elaborate and largely pictorial joke for others to (j)ape?

Rob Ixer  
★ ★

## Tales from a Robotic World

**How Intelligent Machines Will Shape Our Future**

Dario Floreano & Nicola Nosengo

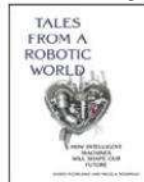
MIT Press 2022

Hb, 224pp, £25, ISBN 9780262047449

If you wondered where techno-optimism went, here it is: a book which interleaves episodes of techno-fiction with accounts of the real-life research behind it, depicting a future chock full of smart, friendly robots improving the world and saving lives. The Swiss authors, one a roboticist, the other a science writer, are both deeply involved in the technology and brimming with enthusiasm.

The book leapfrogs near-future ideas like self-driving cars, delivery drones and flying robo-taxis

for more exotic technologies currently in early stages of development. Scenarios include swarming underwater robots building instant dams to save Venice from flooding, a micro-robot



injected into the bloodstream to perform surgery, earthquake search-and-rescue drones, a robot squad constructing a base for astronauts on Mars and edible robots. The last group are used as prey in a conservation park for predators in 2051, sadly without a whiff of *Jurassic Park* or *Westworld*.

The optimism is unwavering, including a chapter considering sex robots not just as bedmates but as potential marriage partners, though the authors acknowledge this might contribute to the objectification of women. It does also add to the lurking sense of robots as being rich man's toys, which haunts the book.

Conspicuously missing are military robots, perhaps because the authors wanted to present a positive image. This leaves something of a gap, as the military have long been the chief sponsors of mobile robots, including Boston Dynamics YouTube-celebrity quadrupeds, and self-driving cars. Drones large and small are rapidly transforming warfare, but do not get any airtime here.

The positive vibes continue in chapters on the ethics of robots and “the race against the machine” – the way that smarter, more capable machines will tend to displace human workers. While others have suggested universal income or other alternatives to capitalism, the authors believe that better training will ensure jobs for all, even as AI and robots reach human and superhuman capabilities.

There is lots of good stuff here on the literal nuts and bolts of cutting-edge robotics, and the authors are great advocates for the robots to save lives and make the world better. This may not be a good guide to the future. Many current robots exist to make money for big companies or to help fight wars, and technologies like self-driving vehicles aim to take pesky human drivers out of the equation. The real robotic world may not tell such rosy tales.

David Hambling

★ ★ ★

## The Index of Prohibited Books

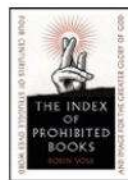
Robin Vose

Reaktion Books 2022

Hb, 296pp, £25, ISBN 9781789146578

Throughout history, autocratic religious leaders have taught an eleventh commandment, “Thou shalt not read”, in particular books that questioned orthodox thinking or might corrupt public morals. Robin Vose’s *Index of Prohibited Books* explores the history of Christian intellectual intolerance. It’s a solid read with extensive footnotes and suggested further reading.

For many centuries it was particularly hazardous to think for yourself. Some especially gruesome tortures and punishments were reserved for heretics



and free thinkers. Forbidden texts were locked away in secret cabinets, to which only a select few of approved intellectuals had

access, or burned on public bonfires.

At one time it was even forbidden to read acceptable texts, such as the Bible, but in the wrong language. William Tyndale, now celebrated for his early translation of the Bible into English, was himself burned at the stake.

Vose focuses on the Vatican’s formalisation of its control over controversial texts in the form of the notorious Index of Prohibited Books. The Roman Catholic Church became especially concerned with the problem of “heretical” texts after the development of printing and the far wider availability of written material than hitherto. The new medium enabled, for instance, translations of Scripture to be made available in the vernacular for any literate person to read and understand without relying on the Church’s interpretation.

Precisely what came to be censored shifted over the centuries. An initial containable list of objectionable Protestant texts grew over time to be an extensive volume containing almost any book not specifically authorised by the Church. Then, as times changed, and the sheer volume of printed material precluded the systematic censorship of every potentially

“pernicious” text, the list became smaller again.

The subject matter to be approved or disapproved changed too. Doctrinal deviations, scientific ideas, erotic content and objectionable art have all come under scrutiny at different times.

Vose notes that while the formal Index, that survived in some form up to 1966, when Pope Paul VI abolished it, might now be a footnote in history, censorship is by no means a thing of the past. Are the forces and motives behind woke culture essentially any different from those that powered the Spanish Inquisition?

Ted Harrison  
★ ★ ★ ★

## Helgoland

**The Strange and Beautiful Story of Quantum Physics**

Carlo Rovelli

Penguin Random House 2022

Pb, 208pp, £10.99, ISBN 9780141993270

Italian physicist Carlo Rovelli takes a novel approach to the mysteries of quantum physics, jumping off from the characters who made the ground-breaking discoveries, the relationships between them, and the North Sea island that lends the book its name.

Why should fortians care? Especially when Rovelli says “quantum mechanics has nothing to say



about paranormal phenomena”. Well, perhaps we find common cause with Werner Heisenberg, when his quantum revolution sweeps away the stuffy

status quo, and opens up a new reality, one in which everything is not as permanent or as solid as it seems, and all phenomena prove related in a “disconcerting” web of observations.

Rovelli’s strength is often the sheer quality of his poetic writing for a popular audience, and this book is no exception, presented here in an impeccable translation by Erica Segre and Simon Carnell. It is essential reading for anyone interested in the underlying nature of our reality, which frankly, should be all of us.

Ryan Shirlow  
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

# Borley rectory revisited

This book approaches 'the most haunted house in England' as social history rather than trying to answer whether ghosts exist

## The Haunting of Borley Rectory

The Story of a Ghost Story

Sean O'Connor

Simon & Schuster 2022

Hb, 496pp, £20, ISBN 9781471194771

Writing about Borley Rectory – “the most haunted house in England” – is a fraught business. The ugly red-brick rectory itself, once situated in a hamlet on the borders of Suffolk and Essex, burnt down 84 years ago and its plot was built over half a century ago. Yet it persists as the topic of numerous books, articles and debates about the genuineness or otherwise of its ghosts, with the details minutely picked over by fervent believers and sceptics alike.

In 2003 a book appeared under the optimistic title *Borley Rectory: The Final Analysis* offered by locals Ted Babbs and Claudine Matthias, but obviously it wasn't. In 2009, I reviewed for FT the encyclopaedic *Borley Rectory Companion: The Complete Guide to the Most Haunted House in England* by Peter Underwood, Paul Adams and Eddie Brazil.

Since then the Rectory and its inhabitants have continued to be studied, fictionalised and mythologised in further books, dramas and a film.

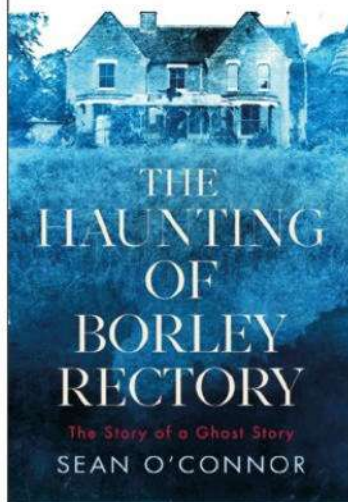
With all the original inhabitants, witnesses and investigators dust and ashes themselves long ago and mostly faded from living memory, surely there is little left to add?

Well, for those who think they've read everything worth reading on the place, *The Haunting of Borley Rectory – The Story of a Ghost Story* is a welcome reminder of how we can all learn more if we live long enough. Eminently readable, it is a book anyone interested in the Borley story may benefit from, whether passingly or as a fixated pedant.

Author Sean O'Connor wisely approaches the case as social history, rather than trying to answer the question of whether ghosts

exist or if the Rectory or its environs really were haunted by more than imagination, misperception and chicanery. Rather than hunt ghosts himself, he has sought out original surviving sources and documentary material – of which there is no shortage – to supply much recondite information and fresh insights.

A new feature for Borley literature is his following-up on the lives of a number of the more minor figures, hapless individuals who were ensnared, against their own wishes, in the decades of controversy, and some of whom



surely count as Borley's collateral damage. Also coming under the spotlight again are many of the key investigators themselves, with the author charting the rise and fall of their reputations.

Mercifully he does not engage in blanket dismissals, judgments or condemnations, treating them more sensitively than many authors and critics of the last 70 years.

He concentrates upon the life and times of the colourful cast of characters forming the vibrant Borley tableaux, the succession of rectors who lived in the building and their wives, especially the enigmatic Marianne Foyster, and some of the most prominent witnesses, including some variously revered or alternatively

furiously damned at points over the years.

Possessing a keen eye for the stray or suggestive fact or anecdote, he lets them be judged both by their own statements and by what he detects as mitigating circumstances. Altogether, he succeeds in further humanising these characters against their controversial popular images.

The author's own background and grounding in the techniques of the media help provide a perspective on how the Borley story cast its spell.

Inevitably, there are gaps: for instance, no mention of Philip Paul who excavated the rectory site in the 1950s and promoted the haunting in the Spiritualist press and even on the BBC's *Panorama* in 1955.

But O'Connor's approach pays dividends, enabling him to fix Borley Rectory as a popular phenomenon created by the thirst for wonders arising in the aftermath of the First World War and redeveloped and refined during the apocalypse of the Second. And it is precisely because there is so much evidence accumulated over Borley (even if hotly contested) that revisiting the story afresh in each generation is possible with the arrival of new paradigms and perspectives.

By placing Borley in its historical context, this book supplies answers about just how the case achieved its iconic “most haunted house” status and became the modern British ghost story that puts others to shame; and it helps explain why some researchers are prepared to devote years of their lives to it and will continue to do so.

So, altogether, a book to be recommended for all enthusiasts of the Borley saga and perhaps the clearest sign yet that the time has come for ghost hunters now to pass this case over to the cultural historians and sociologists.

Alan Murdie

★★★★★

## All That Is Wicked

The 'Victorian Hannibal Lecter' and the Race to Decode the Criminal Mind

Kate Winkler Dawson

Icon Books 2022

Pb, 320pp, £14.99, ISBN 9781785789496

True crime fans will instantly recognise the author, Kate Winkler Dawson, from her work on the hit podcast *Tenfold More Wicked*, and from her other fascinating titles. This latest release is a deep dive into the 19th-century serial killer Edward Ruloff, who was deemed “too intelligent to be killed”. Dawson's book retells not only his murderous endeavours, but also the intrigue that surrounded Ruloff in the wake of his crimes. And the intrigue endures to this day, as his brain has been on display for the last 100 years at Cornell University.

The book takes us through Ruloff's grisly crimes, but Dawson also dedicates a large amount of space to those who delved deep into his psyche once the severity of his murders came to light.

Before modern criminal psychology existed, in the 19th century, phrenologists and alienists looking for a physical cause to justify particularly violent behaviour led the way in attempting to explain how Ruloff could commit such brutality, while at the same time being an intelligent individual.

Dawson draws parallels between the work of these alienists – doctors who specialised in “mental alienation” or illness – who examined Ruloff in an attempt to explain why he could commit such callous crimes, and FBI criminal behaviourists today who share the same goal, albeit a century apart.

Although their techniques differ, the need to understand criminals and the psychology behind their most atrocious acts remains the same.

Whether you consume true crime as a hobby, or have an occasional interest in the darker episodes of history, this book will spark your fascination and be a great way to satisfy your intrigue in all things gruesome.

Cara Dobbing

★★★★★





# SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

DAVID V BARRETT ROUNDS UP THE LATEST TITLES FROM THE WORLD OF SPECULATIVE AND FANTASTIC FICTION

## The Witch of Criswell

John Michael Greer

Sphinx Books 2023

Pb, 180pp, £14.99, ISBN 9781912573851

John Michael Greer's name will be familiar to many FT readers as one of the foremost and most reliable writers on the occult. *The Witch of Criswell* is a young adult novel about 18-year-old Ariel, who is sent to stay with her grandfather for the summer in Adocentyn, an American city with a statue of Elias Ashmole and an occult library, the Heydonian Institution. Intelligent and inquisitive, Ariel discovers that her grandfather is an occult investigator and becomes caught up in his investigation into what seems to start off as poltergeist activity at a nearby farm, but quickly becomes considerably more threatening. Could an 18th-century witch be working dark magic from beyond the grave, or is someone today responsible? There are subtle references to esoteric history throughout: Adocentyn is an Egyptian city in the writings of Hermes Trismegistus; Heydon was a 17th-century astrologer and Rosicrucian; the village of Criswell is undoubtedly an homage to the American psychic. The characters are well-rounded and believable and the plot develops nicely as Ariel makes her own discoveries to help her grandfather unravel the truth, working up to a well-revealed climax.



so there are fortune themes from the start. But the whole novel seems to be an attack on the Order of the Golden Dawn and the Society for Psychical Research – an odd approach if you're writing about occult subjects at that time! Both the plot and the writing are pedestrian; there's far more conversation and introspection than action – very little actually happens until the last couple of chapters. The author was let down by her editor, who should have caught problems like using "disorientated" on one page and the variant spelling "disoriented" on the next; and using "movies" throughout the novel, and "elephant in the room" and "out of body experience", all terms which an editor should have checked were around in 1902 (they weren't) in case the writer didn't.

## Children of Palomar & Other Tales

Gilbert and Mario Hernandez

Fantagraphics 2023

Pb, 280pp, £24.99, ISBN 9781683966999

*Children of Palomar & Other Tales* is the 15th volume in the Love & Rockets Library, the best way of catching up on past stories by Los Bros Hernandez in their decades-running comic. This one, unusually, includes two stories by the third brother, Mario, illustrated by Gilbert. The 100-page title story by Gilbert is a splendid four-parter; in the first part the children of the small central American village – Carmen, Heraclio and others – are in their teens; the village is plagued by fast-moving thieves who turn out to be two scruffy abandoned children, Tonantzín and Diana, who become part of the village community as the L&R myths develop. In the second part a group of boys are kidnapped by what appear to be aliens in spacesuits, or perhaps foreign scientists in hazmat suits, from a research station on the other side of a ravine from the village. By the third part Tonantzín has grown into a young woman who

can see the bloater, a fantasy baby linked to the mysterious ancient statues outside the village, who only appears to women who will never have their own; and by the fourth, Carmen and Heraclio are married, Luba's lispng half-sister Fritz makes her first appearance in the comic, the research scientists turn up again, and we wonder if they might be aliens after all as we learn how mayor Chelo loses her eye. As L&R aficionados will know, the people of Palomar are utterly real.

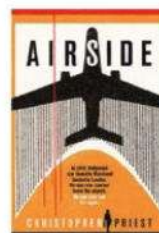
## Frida Kahlo: Her Life, Her Work, Her Home

Francisco de la Mora

SelfMadeHero 2023

Hb, 72pp, £15.99, ISBN 9781914224102

Interestingly I first came across the life of Mexican artist Frida Kahlo in an excellent 12-page story by Gilbert Hernandez, collected in the earlier "library" volume *Amor y Cohetes*. Now a graphic-novel biography of her by Francisco de la Mora explores the life of this astonishing artist, whose work was often surreal even if she eschewed the term Surrealist bestowed on her by André Breton. Her continuing pain from her dreadful injuries in a bus crash in her teens; her tempestuous on-off marriage with muralist Diego Rivera and their affairs with others (including his with her sister and hers with Leon Trotsky); her uncomfortable relationship with the "gringo" art world; and the development of her amazing talent, before her death at just 47 – it's all in here. I'm not impressed with the artwork – it rarely has the feel of Frida Kahlo – but the story is compelling.



## Airside

Christopher Priest

Gollancz 2023

Hb, 298pp, £22, ISBN 9781399608831

Christopher Priest is one of Britain's best known and respected writers of speculative fiction. *Airside* begins with the mystery of an American actress, Jeanette Marchand, who arrived at London Airport in 1949, stepped off the

plane and vanished. Years later a young film critic, Justin Farmer, obsessed with both planes and films, becomes intrigued by her disappearance and tries to track down people who knew her, or who were involved in her last flight. Priest is often a challenging writer, and this is not his easiest novel. Most of it is about Farmer's developing career as a top film critic, interspersed with his reviews of films. For the last third of the novel he's on a world tour of lectures and interviews with film stars and directors, and spending much of his time not just flying, but airside at airports. Airside is an alienating space of *between*; all you can do is wait, and be processed by officials, and walk down interminably long corridors, and wait. There's no escape. Priest captures the innate despair of airside well, but it tends to overwhelm the quest for answers about Jeanette Marchand.

## Conquest

Nina Allen

Riverrun 2023

Hb, 307pp, £16.99, ISBN 9781529428032

Frank, who has anxiety issues, is deeply involved with an online conspiracy theory group. He travels to Paris to meet up with them – and vanishes. His girlfriend asks a private investigator, Robin, to try to track him down – and Robin finds unexpected links to her own past as her investigations develop. Nina Allen's usual style is to make up a novel from several connected shorter pieces. At the heart of *Conquest* is a 60-page short story about an architect who designs a prestigious

apartment tower to commemorate Earth's victory in an interplanetary war – but the building material, imported at great expense from the defeated planet, appears to have a consciousness of its own. Frank's conspiracy group believe something similar – that Earth has been invaded by an alien lifeform that is slowly spreading. Robin's investigations lead her into some dark corners – and I particularly like the alternative endings to the novel.

## On the Nature of Magic

Marian Womack

Titan 2023

Pb, 415pp, £8.99, ISBN 9781803361345

Greer has clearly done his research, resulting in a thoroughly satisfying novel. Marian Womack, equally clearly, hasn't in *On the Nature of Magic*. It's 1902, and two women have set up an occult-orientated detective agency in London. Their first cases are to investigate two ladies who experienced a time-slip at Versailles, and disquieting goings-on at the Paris film studios of illusionist Georges Méliès,

## A slice of cake

Mark Cousins's cinephiliac clip show pulls off a trick worthy of Hitchcock himself, bringing the long-dead auteur back from the grave to speak directly to a 21st century audience.



### My Name is Alfred Hitchcock

Dir Mark Cousins, UK 2022  
On UK release

*My Name is Alfred Hitchcock* is Mark Cousins's love letter to Britain's greatest director, a two-hour essay that takes the road less travelled in approaching its celebrated subject. It's a delight.

The film's central, surprisingly successful conceit, is that it is (according to the opening titles) "Written and voiced by Alfred Hitchcock" – clearly an impossibility. "I know I've been dead for 40 years," Hitch admits, but he wants to speak to us 21st century filmgoers about his work. "So many people have had their say about my movies... but they missed things out. There's more to say about me. Look closely at my pictures and you see things. I see things..."

"Can we look at my movies from more unusual angles?" he asks. And we do. Hitch guides us through his over-analysed body of work in a series of six segments, each focusing on a different theme. They are not the expected ones bequeathed by decades of film criticism – no Catholic guilt, Freudian sex or Lacanian punishment – but Escape, Desire, Loneliness, Time, Fulfilment and Height. You might say these are somewhat arbitrary; in some ways they are, but the Hitchcock corpus

is sufficiently extensive, rich and strange that you could choose your own six categories to fashion a film from and it would work just as well. It's not a chronological survey, but one that proceeds through unexpected leaps and connections, pulling on disparate threads that Cousins follows through a career that started in the silent cinema of Germany and Britain in the 1920s and ended in the Hollywood-in-transition of the mid-1970s.

Most of these threads are visual ones – or at least ideas expressed (obsessively) – through the purely visual medium Hitch believed cinema to be; he was bored by filming people talking. It's a cinema in which story is always preceded by form, where the pre-existing pattern is what creates the MacGuffin of narrative: Henry James's figure in the carpet. These aren't really films about murders, mysteries or Catholic guilt; they're films about time and duration, colour and shape, the language of cinema itself – pure form, pure feeling – which is why they still speak to us across the decades. Cousins brings this out through his selection of clips, leaping from *Blackmail* to *Marnie*, *Number 17* to *Spellbound*, *Sabotage* to *Torn Curtain*, to reveal an obsessive concern with cinematic technique as the engine of emotional power. "Some films are slices of life," Hitch once said, "but mine are slices of cake."

It's a typical Hitch observation: clever and bathetic, it deflects as much as it reveals. It doesn't appear in Cousins's equally clever script, but he absolutely nails Hitchcock's voice, as does comedian/impressionist Alistair McGowan in his rendering of Hitch's lugubrious Cockney speech patterns; it's surprisingly easy to find yourself believing that the great showman really has pulled off his ultimate effect, returning to play, and play with us, one last time: the trickster redux.

There are faces as well as voices: actors may be cattle, but Cousins reminds us that Hitchcock's close-ups of Cary, Ingrid and Grace (Hitch is proud of being on first name terms with the stars) are things of such swooning, transcendent beauty that you can fall right into them, sucked in by the whirlpool movements of Hitch's circling camera. There are other unexpected pleasures, such as Hitch paying touching tribute to his multi-talented wife Alma, working behind the scenes throughout his career, to their marriage and to the fun they had.

And of course there are the clips – not just set pieces and big moments; sometimes just a look or a wink – which send you back to the films themselves. Nearly every surviving feature is represented; I think *Easy Virtue* and *The Skin Game* are missing and I was worried about *Suspicion* until, towards the end of the film, it puts in an appearance with one of my favourite, if uncelebrated, shots in any Hitchcock film.

I don't know if Cousins communicates anything startlingly new about Hitch and his movies in the end; he doesn't have a thesis to present, but he does remind us of the importance of really looking – because when we do that, the films reveal at least some of their secrets.

David Sutton



### The Gates

Dir Stephen Hall, UK 2023  
On digital platforms

The spirit of a recently executed serial killer attempts to find new bodies for both himself and his deceased wife in Stephen Hall's derivative ghost flick.

The film, set in Victorian London, begins *in medias res* with a brutal sacrifice, but gives us far too little of a demonic Richard Brake, relishing his role as the villainous William Colcott, and bringing impressive energy to such ripe lines as "You reek of fear, man of God!"

We are then introduced to John Rhys-Davies as Frederick Ladbroke, a post-mortem photographer, and Elena Delia as his niece and protégée Emma Wickes. Ladbroke and Wickes have a sideline, a machine that thins the veils between worlds, and this brings them to the haunted prison where Colcott was executed. Along with various prison staff, prisoners, the prison chaplain and a medium, they must remain locked in until Colcott's spirit has been sent to Hell.

Ladbroke is the sort of character Rhys-Davies could play in his sleep, and the irascible yet twinkly uncle recalls his role as Professor Arturo in *Sliders*, which is no bad thing. Delia is strong in a rather thankless role, and Adam Pearce lets his wonderfully expressive face do the heavy lifting as the terrified priest. The rest of the cast do a decent job, bar Michael Yare and his am-dram ham medium. The script is plodding and the dialogue ludicrously anachronistic. Though buoyed by Rhys-Davies and his sweet double act with Delia, at almost two hours the film is just far too long. Some neat scary moments show promise, but the slack pace is unforgivable.

Martin Parsons







## TELEVISION

FT's very own couch potato, STU NEVILLE, casts an eye over the small screen's current fortean offerings



When a paranormally-themed TV series wants to set out its stall as serious, it will invariably reinforce its cred by having it fronted by an investigative journalist (presumably lifestyle journalist, gardening correspondent or Heaven forbid, television reviewer would immediately lose it some points). *Paranormal Declassified* (Discovery) is quick to reassure us that Paul Beban, investigative journalist, is just that. He's a serious guy, who looks at files, looks at screens, frowns a bit and looks slightly like David Duchovny. You just know that he has a Dictaphone in his pocket and frequently rings the ever-supportive Mrs Beban to tell her he's pursuing

a lead and isn't going to make it home tonight. Paul is going to delve properly.

In S1 E4, 'Alien Cover-up', he delves into the fertile territory of, well, alien cover-ups. Within the first five minutes there's a gallop through 'Oumuamua (the extra-solar object, not a Pink Floyd album), TicTac videos, a description of the purported Reed family abduction in Massachusetts, Blue Book and a meeting with Kathleen

*She didn't see the UFO, but did feel the effects of radiation sickness*

Marden, an investigator who recounts the Reed case and puts Paul onto a crop circle a mile or two out of town. The flat but otherwise undamaged corn was, the owner assures him, due to UFO microwave energy and not two beardies with planks and ropes. She didn't see the UFO, but she did feel the effects of radiation sickness for a day or two. Paul takes some soil samples from within the circle site, the analysis of which reveals that its structure has been changed due to rapid heating – crucially, though, he didn't take any samples from outside the circle, so we don't know if this is a field-wide issue. Paul nonetheless concludes that the only thing that could cause this would be "some kind of craft".

We meet the younger Reed son who recounts the encounter and mentions being followed by shadowy agents and his dad's death in outright, genuinely

dubious circumstances (a test-tube-full-of-fungus-in-the-air-conditioning-and-laptop-mysteriously-wiped order of dubiousness). Paul then stumbles upon MJ12 and is shocked to learn that there are rumours of crashed saucer retrievals and recovered alien bodies (it does make you wonder why an investigative journalist has only just heard about the last bit, particularly given his age). Anyway, Paul busily underlines things and digs further, citing Eisenhower's alleged visit to Muroc (now Edwards) AFB to look at five different captured craft. Sensibly, Beban checks the President's schedule for the dates in question – Ike was playing golf in Palm Springs. Or was he?

What's not in doubt is Beban's sincerity. The show offers an admirable lack of hysterics, and a good primer on a range of fortean topics. There are far worse – and more credulous – programmes.

## THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot!

RAF Lt Kate Sinclair is having a bad day. First, she's shot down over Afghanistan; then she watches her colleague splutter blood and die. Next, she's shot at by ground troops. When she finally finds shelter in an abandoned Russian bunker, it's another 'Doh!', because she meets a horde of half-human freaks hungry for flesh. Worst of all? She must tackle these hassles in figure-hugging combat gear while brooding narrowed-eyed into the camera (every four minutes). *The Lair* (Blu-ray, DVD and digital) is a video game of a movie... which has its plus points. The opening chase is nicely free of chat and sets the tone for almost constant action. The *Resident Evil* imagery is striking in parts, too: I loved the creature's

tongue. A scene where the mutants descend on a US Army camp, leaping through the air and biting soldiers to death, is thrilling. Yet the film apes lesser video games, with ropery accents, creaky performances and uber-retro stereotypes – because, of course, all grizzled army captains *must* wear an eye patch. The dialogue is weird, too... Sinclair jumps into a foxhole with a US soldier and shouts, "What's the plan, Stan?" I laughed at that. I have no clue if I was supposed to.

The film looks impressive, with convincing sets, a cracking creature design and mostly decent VFX. So it's baffling when a few dodgy CGI shots slip through. Who knew depicting missiles on parachutes would be such a challenge? *The Lair* fuses

*Is it a parody of retro action-horror or a tribute? Who cares?*

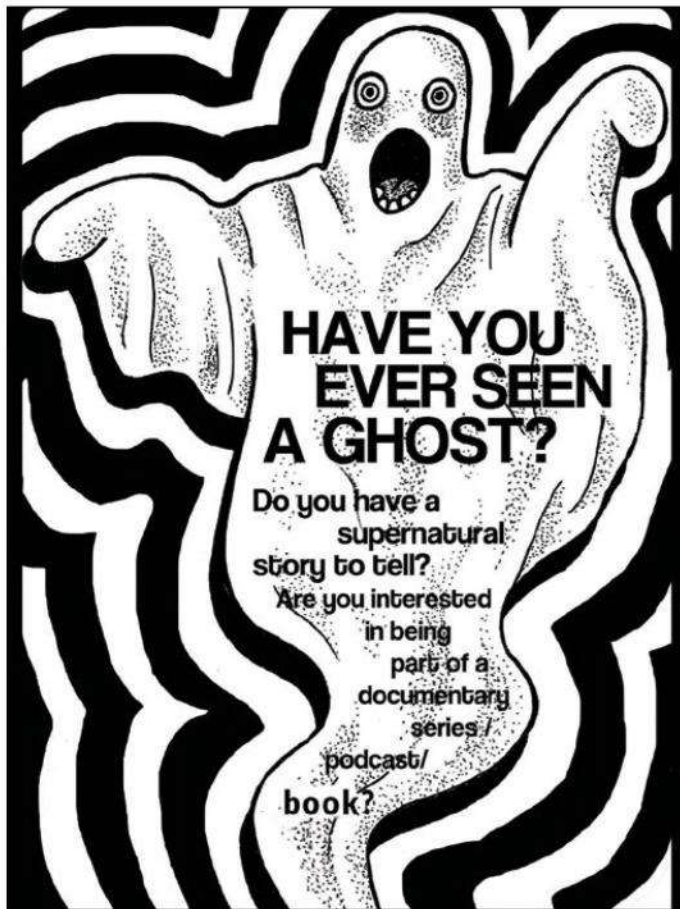
*Dog Soldiers* and *The Descent*, which isn't stealing, since Neil Marshall, who directed those classics, also made this. Those previous films both excelled, with believable characters and serious scares. *The Lair* gleefully dispenses with the former, and half achieves the latter. It's way off those movies, but it is a step up from his recent witchcraft misfire, *The Reckoning*. Marshall signals his John Carpenter influences with his title font choice, so anybody mocking the goofiness of *The Lair* should watch Carpenter's *Ghosts of Mars*, which must be a stylistic grandparent to this.

Is *The Lair* a parody of retro action-horror or a tribute? Who knows, but... who cares? A guy gets his face ripped off, the monsters jump super high, and

people say cringey stuff before opening fire. I like that in a videogame... and sometimes it has its place in popcorn horror, too.

If *The Lair* is all action, *Skinamarink* (Blu-ray, DVD and digital) is anti-action: 100 minutes of static grainy shots of hallways and ceilings. There are people in it, but you'll only ever see their feet or hair. It's being touted as the scariest horror in years, and many folks (most?) will facepalm at that claim... but bear with it. It works like one of those Magic Eye 3D posters or a psychomanteum. I watched, bored, for 30 minutes, then started seeing things lurking in the shadowy digital artefacts. At one point, I gasped in shock at nothing more than a slow fade. I felt dread at times; maybe you will too. Full marks to the woman who does the audio description track on this disc: "Another ceiling, with shadows... some lego on the floor... the ceiling again."





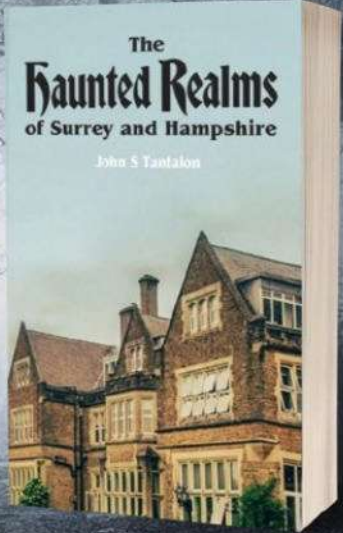


**HAVE YOU EVER SEEN A GHOST?**

Do you have a supernatural story to tell?  
Are you interested in being part of a documentary series / podcast / book?

To find out more, contact:  
[INPURSUITOFGHOSTS@GMAIL.COM](mailto:INPURSUITOFGHOSTS@GMAIL.COM)

**THE BRAND NEW BOOK**

FROM THE HAUNTED WORLD OF JOHN S TANTALON



**ARRIVING JUNE 2023**

## RECORD COLLECTOR'S SPECIAL EDITIONS



Order yours today at [shop.recordcollectormag.com](http://shop.recordcollectormag.com)



# LETTERS

CONTACT US BY POST: PO BOX 1200, WHITSTABLE CT1 9RH, OR E-MAIL [SIEVEKING@FORTEANTIMES.COM](mailto:sieveking@forteantimes.com)  
PLEASE PROVIDE US WITH YOUR POSTAL ADDRESS



## Film curses

James Wright's letter [FT431:62-63] rightly points out that the film *Poltergeist* was allegedly 'cursed'. However, he gave me a laugh when he mentions actress "JoBeth Williams, who won the part for showing precocious reading ability at her audition". While I'm sure Ms Williams's reading ability was excellent, I wouldn't call it 'precocious', given that she was 33 years old at the time. Mr Wright was referring to Heather O'Rourke, who – at the age of just five – was cast as Carol Anne Freeling (the family's youngest child). She did indeed die of a congenital intestinal condition at the age of 12 (JoBeth Williams played the mother, Diane Freeling – just a slip on Mr Wright's part, for sure).

He also references two actors who have played Superman. However, while the first was indeed George Reeves, the second was Christopher Reeve (no 's' – a common slip).

Lastly, all credit to Mr Wright for highlighting the tragic case of Judith Barsi (the child actress who voiced the character 'Ducky' in *The Land Before Time*) and her murder at the age of 10 (along with her mother) at the hands of her father. She tends to get forgotten in discussions of this kind.

Your magazine certainly covers some ground; sometimes funny, sometimes tragic – but *always* interesting.

**Graham Mullins**  
*Orpington, Kent*

## Dancing lights

Lise Cribbin refers to dancing points of light and wonders if she can "see air" [FT432:66]. I, too, have this experience sometimes. For me they behave like sperm cells seen under a microscope. They appear as points of light and move so fast they appear to have a tail. They rush around in various directions followed by other such points of light. The clue for me was when she says she adjusts her way of looking in order to see them. This is also the same for me.

I am pretty certain that my own experience is produced by the flow of blood through the capil-



This photo, which has been doing the rounds on social media, makes a good point about people mistakenly thinking they are seeing something paranormal. Is it a ghost? Is it Batman? No – it's a horse wearing a blanket standing face on. Thanks to Cathy Peake for sending us this photograph

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 1200, Whitstable CT1 9RH or to [sieveking@forteantimes.com](mailto:sieveking@forteantimes.com)

laries on the surface of my eye. Normally invisible, these can be seen if the focus is adjusted and the light is right. What I am seeing is, I think, single blood cells moving through capillaries very quickly and somehow magnified and appearing in the world rather than being a phenomenon produced by the eye itself.

Perhaps Lise Cribbin is seeing air or the souls of the dead, but it may also be her own blood flowing through the eye.

**Martin Goodson**  
*London*

What Lise Cribbin describes is similar to something motivational speaker the late Stuart Wilde describes, calling it "The Grey Rain", which is mentioned in his "33 Steps to Initiation" tape series, alongside what he admits

is just retinal floaters in the vitreous humour of the eyeball. It's supposedly like a magic eye puzzle, but instead of a boat or a cat or whatever, you get to see through the Matrix.

**James Wright**  
*Southend on Sea, Essex*

Like Lise Cribbin I too have seen dancing lights in front of my eyes. I would describe it as golden specs of light, in continual motion. To notice it, I have to still my vision. It's not something I do all the time but requires going into a sort of meditative state. I remember doing this in one house we stayed in and it was like *The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy*, where Brighton Pier wobbled insubstantially. When I tried this while looking in a mirror, a series of faces replaced my own, which I think in the old days was called physical mediumship.

Just before my father died, he described something similar. He said it was like dust coming from the sky and falling down, but maybe he was seeing pollution (the veil between life and death, becoming thinner as we near the end, making us more sensitive\* to reality perhaps). He also saw the renowned Black Shuck, which expanded and disappeared before him.

\* *Trauma seems to increase sensitivity, research has discovered. My wife broke her wrist about a month ago and the uninjured arm is fine but the other one is hypersensitive (material that feels soft to one hand, feels rough to the other and cold feels hot, etc).*

**Tony Sandy**  
*By email*

## Not immortal

Fortean Times #432 was filled with fascinating titbits, such as Lise Cribbin's letter describing how she 'saw air' as a child (p.66). I, too, saw the same thing up until my early twenties, after which I had to 'adjust' something in my vision in order to see the dancing globules briefly. Then the ability left me entirely. I think what we saw was Wilhelm Reich's Orgone energy, or something like it.

• Simon Young's report on the Count of St Germain (p.29) brought to mind my French professor from years ago, the translator of a cult classic on the Nazis and the occult. I couldn't help but notice when I visited his office that the walls were lined with old occult books, AE Waite and the like. Having eagerly read Karl von Eckartshausen's *The Cloud Over the Sanctuary* – OK, I was very young – I was in those days looking all about for the Unknown Masters and various Immortals, and my occult antennae were all atingle, so I naturally questioned the professor about various esoteric secrets. At some point in our conversation, he looked me straight in the eye and said, "I'm a lot older than I look." Whoa, Nellie! A real Immortal! I just about fell out of my chair. As I said, I was very young. He did speak very



## Dore Stone

Regarding the article by Lisa Gledhill on the burial places of English rulers, and in particular the question of who was the first English ruler [FT424:66-69]: there is on the outskirts of Sheffield in the village of Dore on the village green on Savage Lane a stone mounted by an Anglo-Saxon shaped shield that marks the site of the battle between King Ecgbert of Wessex and King Aenred of Northumbria. The stone has on it a dragon and underneath the words 'King Ecgbert of Wessex led his army to Dore in the year A.D. 829 against King Aenred of Northumbria by whose submission King Ecgbert became first overlord of all England'. The stone is listed on several history websites and on the list of war memorials. Presumably being an overlord could count as a king; if so this would predate the 10th century date in the excellent article.

**George Proctor**

*By email*

fluent Old French, and looked a good bit like the descriptions of the Count. Sadly, he died, as mortals do, during the pandemic at what appeared to be a ripe old age; but who knows how old he *really* was? I reserve judgement.

- Lastly, Bob Fischer in "The Haunted Generation" (p.59) compares Josephine Foster's "unearthly warble of a voice" to "the piercing wail of Tennessee desert cats". Being a lifetime resident of Tennessee, I must point out that there are no deserts in the state, and no such thing as Tennessee desert cats. Perhaps, however, he intended to reference the famed Wampus Cats of Tennessee, whose inhuman screams lure men into the forest to their doom. An excellent summary of the folklore can be found in *Legend & Lore of East Tennessee* by Shane S Simmons: as he tells the story, the Wampus Cat is a beautiful Cherokee maiden cursed to roam the Earth forever, half mountain lion and half woman, her scream presaging death in the tribe. I mentioned searching as a teenager for the Wampus Kitty (as we called her) in a letter which appeared in FT251:77; alas, like the Unknown Masters, the Wampus Kitty has remained elusive.

**Julia Morgan Scott**

*By email*

## Nazi flying saucers

I enjoyed SD Tucker's article "Unidentified Fascist Objects" [FT430:44-49]. The 'Peiltochterkompass' image particularly caught my eye, but no clarification seems to have been provided as to what the item in question actually is. The term is a fairly generic reference to a 'repeater compass', which in this case (although it looks a bit large) presumably came from an aircraft. The repeater shows the vehicle's heading based on a feed from a 'master' gyrocompass. Gyrocompasses have been in widespread use since the turn of the 19th century in any air, sea or land vehicle application where magnetic interference would pose a problem for conventional magnetic compasses. Of course the very existence of gyrocompasses renders the 'Himmelskompass' concept rather redundant.

I have seen a few pieces of Nazi-era military instrumentation and they do seem to have had a penchant for branding – typically a plaque featuring the German Imperial Eagle with a swastika incorporated below it. What I have not seen elsewhere is a curiously distorted swastika displayed by itself right in the centre dial of a precision instrument. Since that symbol is the only thing specifically linking this artefact to the Third Reich

(as opposed to just Germany in general), along with the fact that it was picked up in a junk shop for a few dollars, I am inclined to doubt whether it's even a piece of military hardware.

**Ian l'Anson**

*By email*

At the start of his feature 'Unidentified Fascist Objects', SD Tucker relates at great length the story of a terrible fraudster (The Furrier) just after WWII, and his equally hapless devotee. To use this as 'ammunition' for his broader argument that there were no Nazi saucer-type experiments is just lazy.

And, to reiterate the points from my previous letter [FT429:62], I am *not* arguing that the Nazis had all kinds of operational inter-planetary craft, etc; but I *am* pointing out that they were super-desperate during the last two years of the war, and there is straightforward evidence that they were, at the very least, looking into a wide range of exotic weaponry, *including* the various saucer-shaped craft, and unusual propulsion systems, and of course, there is always 'Project Silbervogel' (Project Silverbird); the design for a suborbital rocket bomber that was a commissioned project by Eugene Sanger and Irene Bredt.



I cite also The 'Sun Gun' contemplation – a huge, orbital mirror-weapon (shades of Archimedes!) V1s and V2s found with preparation to hold a dirty nuclear bomb, and/or be pilotable. The list goes on and on, for *genuine* and proven last-ditch "Wunderwaffen" that mostly (thankfully) didn't proceed to combat-readiness or actual deployment and usage.

It's correct to point out that Kenneth Arnold didn't coin the term 'Flying Saucers' – it was a radio announcer; but apart from the inclusion of KA's photo of himself holding a drawing of one of the aircraft, Mr Tucker doesn't mention the crucial fact that KA described the nine aircraft as being "crescent-shaped", which to my mind – and to plenty of others – calls to mind the 24-29 (accounts differ) boxed up Horton 229s that the US brought back from Germany at the end of the war.

*Fortean Times* claims to promote benign scepticism – not outright dismissal, without a full explanation as to why the topic has been dismissed. Filling pages with barely – if at all – related fluffery could be regarded as misinformation in itself.

**Mark Pearson**

*By email*

SD Tucker's feature in FT430 clears up questions I have had for a long time. Long ago, I found a website in the USA that had many similar images of German flying saucers. I filed them away, hoping to get an explanation some day; now I have it. There are many images in the style of the one on page 48. That pose of the pilot is ludicrous: try it yourself. (The little sphere is the same size as a 'rescue ball' created for the US Space Shuttle. If a person can last 15 minutes in that position, they are deemed able to use it; apparently, most cannot.)

The photo on page 44 was reversed, obvious from the swastika.

- The balloon report (pp.28+29) crystallized my desire not to launch a balloon. Starting last summer, I began to plan a UFO sighting. I'd put four or five mylar-coated 'Happy Birthday' helium-filled balloons inside a white plastic



trash bag. One or two electric tea lights would be attached under it, and it would be released one quiet midnight. It would be visible and maybe a radar target. In the light of recent events, I'd have added a 3x4 card with "If found, return to the Balloon Desk, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington DC." Doing it now would result in my being labelled a domestic terrorist or a dangerous racist. Project cancelled, with some regret.

**Michael Holt**

*By email*

## Unhappy non-clappers

Martin Stubbs seems rather peeved in his attack on an FT reviewer [FT431:66] and appeared to be exemplifying the kind of reductionist we might term killjoys. I'm certain that there are people who have come to conclusions about the world along reductionist lines by careful and balanced application of their reason, who have both imagination, a sense of humour, and a sense of proportion, and perhaps Mr Stubbs is also one of these people at heart.

However, his description of those who believe in anomalous experiences as "a fascinating phenomenon" is unhelpful and combative. Neither he nor any other reductionist is some sort of exceptional being fired by the light of truth, and I could just as easily say that those who feel the need to excoriate others and prove primacy in areas where evidence either way is simply not required, are simply deluded the opposite way, victims of a cultural machismo that exhorts them to flagellate themselves with unnecessary nihilism because "they can take it".

After all, their need to prove dominance in discourses where finality is unnecessary is rarer than the simple human ability to believe what we see, hear and feel, and therefore far more anomalous. Evidence is better suited to courtrooms, hospitals, engineering labs, forums where decision is vital.

There's no evidence for consciousness, love, friendship,

or the bulk of things that make up our lives. None of the virtues can be proven, but people don't seem to get weirdly angry when people talk and act as though these socially accepted unproven phenomena are real. Evidence is a tool, not a box we must cram our minds into no matter the suffering it causes us and others.

It is difficult, even in laboratory conditions, to prove or disprove absolutely anything conclusively. The rest of the time we improvise and use judgement and experience as guides. Statements like "Fairies aren't real" aren't simply useless, neither serving or saving anyone; they are also fundamentally untrue, because such a statement cannot be proved or disproved.

If you really live by a standard of absolute proof, you must also admit what is and is not proven, without jumping the gun. If you live by absolutes, you must be strict with yourself and admit no half measures.

Personally I'd rather live by instinct, intuition, experience, and when necessity dictates, the excellent tool that evidence can constitute, but even then as a guide only, because as Fort pointed out, there'll be more evidence along in a minute. Belief in fairies – or to generalise, openness to things being stranger than we thought they were – is not something that requires the hammer of evidence. No-

## Bus stop puzzle

When I was at the bus stop on my way to work, I noticed a really strange hole at the front of the bus shelter. It looked as if it was a result of an alien laser fight the night before. Either that, or it was toxic bird poo! What do you think?

**Miranda Tree**

*By email*



body's life hangs in the balance because any of us wish to leave open the possibility of fairies.

Would I bet my life on the existence of fairies? No. But would I bet my life on the non-existence of fairies? Also no, because why take the risk? I don't think belief is as simple as an on-off switch. I think we can say "I am happy to leave a space untried and untried for the existence or non-existence of fairies over here in my mind", until such time as it becomes something vitally important that requires an assessment of validity.

Even if it became vital to judge the above, if you were honest you'd surely settle for saying "it is certainly very unlikely that fairies exist in any way that can be relied upon, and so acting as though they don't, if there is anything weighty hanging in the balance, is most probably the right course of action."

However, if there's nothing riding on it, I'm happy to refer to them as The Good People, for instance, because why take any risk of bad luck, if there is no cost to avoiding it? Would I spend a pound on a fairy-related good luck charm from a stall in Glastonbury? Probably, if it looked cool.

Would I wear a charm to deflect bullets before charging into battle? Yes,

because where's the harm? But I wouldn't charge into battle because I had the charm. I might use it as a tool to psych myself up to face something I *really* felt I had to do.

Fairies may or may not be there to hear our applause, but I'm happy to clap.

**Dean Teasdale**

*Gateshead, Tyne & Wear*

## Vanishing gin and Nessie

- Regarding the vanishing gin in Strange Continent [FT431:23]: I don't know whether to congratulate or condemn the gin company Ginial for having the audacity to offer "special numbered" empty bottles to their pre-order customers. I don't think it's much of a tonic for the troops.

- The car accident detailed in Peculiar Postcards [FT431:67] looks like a case of the cyclist not appreciating the potential speed of a motor car. When I lived in East Africa in the early Sixties, there were several reports of children in rural areas crossing roads and being hit by cars. It was believed that they must have seen and heard the vehicle, but failed to appreciate how quickly it was approaching them, due to the scarcity of such traffic where they lived.

- The article 'Nessie at 90' reproduces the famous photo by Hugh Gray [FT431:36]. This was debunked in a book I read many



THE SUREAL MCCOY

# LETTERS

years ago as a dog with a stick in its mouth, swimming towards the camera. That is all I can see when I look at it. [Editor's note: this has been mentioned in FT before.]

**Dave Miles**  
By email

## Uplifting

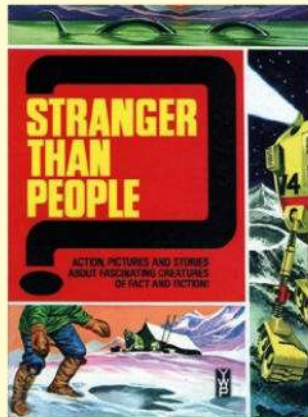
In the early 1970s I was a student at Queen's University Belfast. There was a student newspaper called *Gown*, and one issue ran a short story that went as follows. A student was sitting an examination. As soon as the papers were handed out, his heart sank and he began to panic. Looking at the paper in front of him, not only could he not answer any of the questions, he found it hard even to understand them. As a good Catholic, he turned to prayer, but in his panic the only saint whose name he could remember was St Joseph of Cupertino (1606-63). So he prayed to St Joseph for help, not remembering that the only thing St Joseph was famous for was levitation. Almost immediately, he felt himself rising out of his seat and floating above his desk. The invigilator spotted this and came over to see what on earth was happening. As he got to the desk he glanced down and noticed something. "Oh dear," he said. "I'm so sorry, I seem to have given you the wrong paper. This is the one you should have had."

This story always stayed in my memory. But just recently I was sorting out some material and came across it, much to my surprise – evidently I had clipped it out at the time. So I now know who wrote it, and it was none other than Bernard MacLaverty, a contemporary of mine at Queen's, now a famous novelist.

**Roger Musson**  
Edinburgh

## Odd bookmarks

Re Craig Colley's letter [FT427:62], I may have an explanation for the presence of a pristine four-decade-old ticket on a bus. I am an avid reader and cannot pass a second-hand bookshop or stall without checking the titles on offer. I almost invariably end up buying one or two books and



## Stranger than people

In answer to Andy Kelly's letter of enquiry 'Which book?' [FT430:64], I know which book he is seeking, because it greatly nurtured what became my own abiding interest in all fortan phenomena when I owned a copy as a child. Moreover, although mine was later discarded because it quite literally fell apart from numerous readings, many years later I was

able to purchase a replacement, which I still treasure.

Published by YWP in 1968, it was a large, beautifully illustrated, annual-like hardback book entitled *Stranger Than People*, packed with chapters on mysterious phenomena, fascinating historical artefacts, real but bizarre animals as well as cryptids, and even some memorable sci-fi stories (e.g. Klumpok). And yes, it contained both of the subjects accurately recalled by Andy – the supposed disappearance into thin air of David Lang (complete with a spooky illustration on p.108), and the giant sea-bottom footprints (illustrated on pp.106-107), both subjects appearing in a chapter entitled 'The Mark of the Stranger'. Here are the relevant pictures. This fascinating book went out of print very rapidly, but I've documented it in some of my own books and blog articles (e.g. <https://karlshuker.blogspot.com/2017/11/the-giant-ant-gods-of-klumpok-and.html>), so hopefully my coverage will help introduce *Stranger Than People* to a whole new generation of readers.

**Dr Karl Shuker**, By email



have on many occasions found in them random pieces of paper used as bookmarks by their last reader. Business cards, medical prescriptions, shop receipts, knitting patterns, recipes, birthday cards, photographs, train, plane and bus tickets, a publisher's advertisement explaining how to order their 1970 catalogue... the list goes on.

Some of these 'bookmarks' were decades old and in perfect condition, just like Craig's ticket. The last reader obviously couldn't or wouldn't finish the book; the bookmark remained undisturbed for years. I think it fell out of a passenger's book unnoticed.

My findings so far have all been fairly mundane, but there might be makeshift bookmarks out there that would shatter the fortan world, for instance a written confession by Jack the Ripper or the whereabouts of Lord Lucan. Here's hoping!

**Valérie Dabbs**  
Montpellier, France

## Yorkshire's walking dead

Evidence for zombies in mediæval Yorkshire can also be found underground [FT431:29]. Between 1950 and 1990, the remains of a deserted village at Wharram Percy in Ryedale, Yorkshire, were extensively excavated by archaeologists. They found that the village had been intermittently occupied from the Iron Age until the 16th century. They also noticed that the villagers buried their dead in one of two places. Most lay in the churchyard, but in the village itself there was a pit for bodies bearing evidence of mutilations and burning.

As the English Heritage guidebook (2013, p18) notes, such treatment is consistent with reports from mediæval writers about how the corpses of revenants were treated at the time. This was to prevent them rising and inflicting the living with the sort of treatment Simon Young describes in his article. Further details are no doubt available in the extensive excavation report.

**Mike Haigh**  
Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire



# It Happened to Me...

## The Shadow of James Dunsby

Corporal James Dunsby died in hospital on 30 July 2013 from multiple organ failure caused by dehydration during a Special Forces selection march in the Brecon Beacons. The accident made major headlines in the national press at the time. This year marks the 10th anniversary of his death, and a respectable distance to explore some unusual experiences I had around my friend's untimely demise.

James had sat next to me in a ramshackle Portacabin on Salisbury Plain where we prepared training courses for the British Army in Afghanistan, where James himself had served as commander of a tank unit. Alongside our day jobs, we would break the tension with ridiculous pranks and long-running jokes about the decline of the Empire – the farthest-flung corner of which, in Tasmania, James hailed from. As a civil servant, I would go home at the weekend, but he would carry on as an Army reservist, keeping up the skills he had learnt in the Australian regulars.

Possessed of seemingly infinite energy and enthusiasm, James had the spirit of a Labrador puppy trapped in the body of a huge, but never physically intimidating man. After a mere two years working together, I counted him among the greatest friends I had ever had, though it was testament to his character that so did many others.

In the spring of 2013 I had moved away from Salisbury to a new posting in rural Cambridgeshire, and weeks had passed since I last saw James. A mutual friend had found an excuse to make the journey, but on the day in question he was running hours late. I became concerned that something might have happened to him on the narrow country roads and checked in with James about when he had set off that morning. Of course, our friend turned up unharmed and, feeling rather sheepish about worrying everyone, I let James know that he was OK.

I remembered making a deliberate mental note: that it was



**"It was as if James was trying to tell me something important to him before he 'left'"**

important as a good fortune to record any inaccurate predictions, and not just the ones that came true by chance. "Thank God," James texted back, in his usual way both overstated and yet utterly earnest at the same time. I folded my phone shut and slipped it into my pocket.

It was the last time I would ever hear from him.

A couple of weekends later, I was back home with my wife Kate and my eldest daughter Emily, who was then still a wee baby. The news had broken online that Cory Monteith, star of the international hit musical show *Glee*, had been found dead of a drug overdose in his hotel room. I thought immediately of James's wife Bryher, a folk singer, who was a huge fan of the show and often incorporated mash-ups inspired by the series into her live performances. It was as good excuse as any to catch up.

I went to text her. "Sorry to hear that your hero has died," I typed, with my usual off-colour sense of humour. But as I looked at the message on the screen something felt terribly wrong, and I quickly deleted it.

We took Emily to a farm on the outskirts of town. While she played, I noticed two other

parents sitting at an adjacent table with their Sunday paper. For some reason I became agitated again, when I saw over their shoulders what they were reading. It was an article about Prince Harry's time in Afghanistan, and there was a picture I had often seen of Harry and James together. When the couple left I sneaked over and had a quick peek. I was disappointed, James had been cropped out of the familiar photo and no, he wasn't mentioned by name either.

But I was still feeling agitated, and one way or another James was on my mind all day.

That same evening the BBC mentioned that several reservists had been airlifted off a mountain in Wales. The following morning, I passed the newspapers laid out neatly on a coffee table in the officer's mess: "Heat Kills Two Soldiers on SAS Test" and "Soldiers Marched to Death". I emailed James to check he didn't know anyone hurt during the selection. His out-of-office came back – he was on leave for the period of the exercise. Then the phone rang, another colleague, asking if I had any information, and whether James himself had been among the casualties. I felt that I needed to get in touch with Bryher or anybody close to the family. But what to say? And to whom?

It was at that point I was asked to speak to a young scientist from the Defence Science and Technology Laboratories. Our RAF officer had overheard both my phone call and a similar conversation the female scientist had had, just a few feet away. One of

LEFT: the famous picture of James (at far right) and Harry (second from left) in Afghanistan.

the injured soldiers was a close family friend; he was unconscious but still alive.

It was scarcely credible; we had barely spoken before, she was from hundreds of miles away and on secondment to my team – and now she was standing in front of me as we both realised that we knew the same person, and that, yes, it was James.

That night I had a jarring, confused nightmare. It was if James was trying to tell me something that was important to him before he 'left'. The medical news that dripped through over the coming days was increasingly negative, even though Bryher desperately kept fighting for her hero. It was clear to his friends that even if he did recover, in all likelihood James would be left a mere shadow of his former self. And that's when I had another, even more significant dream.

A handful of us from work were ushered into the garden behind his house, where he was sitting in a vintage rocking chair with his lap covered in an old knitted shawl. If he was going to be ill, he would affect the air of a consumptive Victorian, dammit.

For our part we felt awkward and had little to say. Desperate to break the sombre mood, I decided to challenge the big, frail man to an arm wrestle.

"Thanks for letting me win," I said after our brief tussle. And he smiled and laughed, and, for a second, he was himself again. I felt such an enormous wave of relief that he was still there, that despite being physically destroyed, the essential person, that spark, remained somewhere.

But in reality, James never did wake up; he died just a few days later, when his body couldn't take the strain any longer.

It's odd, because I remember that dream as the last time I really saw him, even though it was merely his shadow, conjured up by my own imagination. But it gave me a tangible feeling of communication, of reassurance and of closure.

**Ryan Shirlow**  
Leeds, West Yorkshire



# PECULIAR POSTCARDS



**JAN BONDESON** shares another deltiological discovery from his prodigious collection of postcards. This month's pictorial blast from the past features a simian star of the early 20th century commemorated in a number of postcards

## 37. THE NAPOLEON OF THE CHIMP WORLD



**ABOVE:** A portrait of Little Nap in a characteristic pose. **TOP RIGHT & RIGHT:** Nap riding his bicycle and performing with dogs disguised as ponies.

'Little Nap', also known as 'The Napoleon of the Chimpanzee World', was a young chimpanzee, dressed up in a uniform to resemble the great Napoleon, complete with boots, a hat and a sword.

At least eight postcards, all of them quite rare today, were issued to celebrate this unusual star of the circus and variety theatre, with Nap posing on a plinth, sitting astride a large dog disguised to resemble a pony, riding a bicycle, or sitting in a motorcycle combination. I have six of these cards, all of them with the text 'USA Studios' on the back: this was a firm of photographers, with

branches both in London and the Home Counties, started by John Harry Woolfe and active at least since 1908. All my cards are unposted, an indication that they were bought as mementos of Nap's performance rather than for use through the mail.

Little Nap is recorded to have been born in 1908. His show-business career is likely to have been inspired by the celebrated chimpanzee Consul, who performed in several reincarnations after the original Consul had expired in 1904. The Consuls each dressed in an elegant suit, complete with a tall hat, smoked large cigars, and drank beer and

other alcoholic beverages. Nap's owner hoped that his own ape would be able to usurp some of Consul's success.

In July 1912, at the age of four, Little Nap made his debut at the Bedminster Hippodrome. He posed and strutted on stage, rode a small bicycle, or sat astride the large and docile dog fitted with a saddle. On his fourth birthday, he visited the Clifton Zoological Gardens, where he showed no inclination to join the captive simians behind bars; his holiday outing continued as he went on to visit the Children's Hospital to entertain the patients there.

Little Nap went on to

visit Leeds, Sheffield and Portsmouth. In Bradford, there was an alarming incident when Nap escaped and took refuge on the top of the house, keeping his trainer and the theatre manager at bay with all the missiles he could lay his hands on. It took a fireman with a powerful hose-pipe to dislodge Nap from his vantage point on the roof. In November 1912, Nap was at the Hippodrome in Exeter, where an enthusiastic writer in the *Devon and Exeter Gazette* described his performance in detail. After riding the dog and playing billiards, he rode a bicycle with his fellow





ABOVE: Little Nap astride his canine charger. BELOW: Nap blows out a candle before retiring for the night.

chimpanzee 'Mrs Nap' travelling in the sidecar, dressed in female attire. The show had developed since its inauguration, and the dog had been persuaded to do some tricks as well, with Nap acting the part of the ring-master, cracking a whip. Nap then ate his dinner like the perfect gentleman, drank some wine, smoked a cigar, and went to bed dressed in a spotlessly clean nightshirt. "Never before has such a novel turn been witnessed at Exeter, and those who patronised the Hippodrome last evening could not fail to have been struck with the marvellous little fellow!" exclaimed the easily amused journalist.

Little Nap went on to perform in Burnley and Nottingham, before coming to Gloucester in early January. The sale of his postcards is said to have exceeded all precedents. A writer in the *Gloucester Journal* went to see him at the King's Hall, being greatly amused when the uniformed Nap entered the stage sitting on his white canine charger, waving his sword about. Just a week later, the *Gloucestershire Echo* presented the stark and tragic news that the Napoleon of the



Chimpanzee World had expired from pneumonia, a victim of the cold climate, it was believed. Two local doctors had been called, but they found the case a hopeless one. One of these doctors, Firmin Cuthbert, was given the body, which he had stuffed and placed in his private museum.

His celebrated chimpanzee a corpse, and a promising show business career nipped in the bud, Little Nap's trainer faced a quandary. Fortunately for him, the *Gloucestershire Echo* had been the only paper to report Nap's demise, so he

purchased another chimpanzee and had it undergo a rigorous training regime. In July 1913, the second 'Little Nap' made his debut in Sheffield, doing the same tricks as his predecessor. The tour went on to Manchester, Leicester, Edinburgh and Glasgow; good care was taken to come nowhere near Gloucester, where the stuffed body of the original performer stood in Dr Firmin Cuthbert's museum, to prevent the deception being exposed in the newspaper press. In 1914, Nap visited Dublin, Antrim, Coventry and

Dover, where a journalist found it hard to believe that this clever performer was really a member of the simian tribe and not some deformed dwarf.

At the outbreak of the Great War, Nap was in Leamington Spa. The last we hear of him is that in August 1914 he performed in Aberdeen, with great success; he would become a wartime casualty, just like many other small-time performers, discarded at a time when people had more serious matters to think of and the provincial music halls and theatres faced hard times.

# READER INFO

## HOW TO SUBSCRIBE

ANNUAL SUB of 12 issues (inc p&p) UK £50.58; Europe £62; USA £70; Rest of World £70.

Please see house ads in the latest issue for details of special offers.

## UK, EUROPE, NORTH AMERICA & REST OF WORLD

Major credit cards accepted. Cheques or money orders should be in sterling, preferably drawn on a London bank and made payable to Diamond Publishing Limited. Mail to: **Fortean Times**, Diamond Publishing Limited, 2nd Floor, Saunders House, 52-53 The Mall, Ealing, W5 3AT. NB: This address should be used for orders and subscriptions only.

Telephone payments and queries: +44 (0) 208 752 8195.

E-mail payments and queries: [hello@metropolis.co.uk](mailto:hello@metropolis.co.uk)

## HOW TO SUBMIT

*Fortean Times* reserves all rights to reuse material submitted by FT readers and contributors in any medium or format.

## ILLUSTRATIONS

Contact the art director by email ([etienne@forteantimes.com](mailto:etienne@forteantimes.com)) before sending samples of work. We cannot guarantee to respond to unsolicited work, though every effort will be made to do so.

## ARTICLE SUBMISSIONS

Please send all submissions or ideas for articles to David Sutton, Editor, *Fortean Times* by email: [dsutton@forteantimes.com](mailto:dsutton@forteantimes.com). As we receive a large volume of submissions, a decision may not be immediate.

## LETTERS

Letters of comment or about experiences are welcome. Send to PO Box 1200, Whitstable, CT1 9RH, UK or email [sieveking@forteantimes.com](mailto:sieveking@forteantimes.com). We reserve the right to edit submissions.

## BOOKS, PERIODICALS AND REVIEW MATERIAL

Contact the reviews editor at: [dvbarrett@forteantimes.com](mailto:dvbarrett@forteantimes.com)

## CAVEAT

*FT* aims to present the widest range of interpretations to stimulate discussion and welcomes helpful criticism. The opinions of contributors are not necessarily those of the editors. *FT* can take no responsibility for submissions, but will take all reasonable care of material in its possession. Requests for return of material should be accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope or an International Reply Coupon.

*We occasionally use material that has been placed in the public domain. It is not always possible to identify the copyright holder. If you claim credit for something we've published, we'll be pleased to make acknowledgement.*

## CLIPSTERS WANTED

Regular clipsters have provided the lifeblood of *Fortean Times* since it began in 1973. One of the delights for the editors is receiving packets of clips from Borneo or Brazil, Saudi Arabia or Siberia. We invite you to join in the fun and send in anything weird, from trade journals, local newspapers, extracts from obscure tomes, or library newspaper archives.

To minimise the time spent on preparing clippings for a Fort Sort, we ask that you cut them out and not fold them too small. Mark each clip (on the front, where possible) with the source, date and your name, so that we can credit you in the listing (right) when we use the material. For UK local and overseas clips, please give the town of publication. For foreign language clips, we appreciate brief translations. To avoid confusion over day and month, please write the date in this form: **1 JULY 2023**. If you send photocopies, copy on one side of the paper only.

Mail to: **Fortean Times, PO BOX 1200, WHITSTABLE, CT1 9RH**

E-mail: [news@forteantimes.com](mailto:news@forteantimes.com)

# WHY FORTEAN?



**FORTEAN TIMES** is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing that some scientists tended to argue according to their personal beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is

in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENTS

**AUSTRALIA** Graham Cordon (SA), Tony Healy (ACT), John Palazzi (NSW), Len Watson (Qld). **CANADA** Brian Chapman (BC), Graham Conway (BC).

**CYBERSPACE** John F Callahan, Hugh Henry, Steve Scanlon, Janet Wilson.

**ENGLAND** Gail-Nina Anderson, Louise Bath, James Beckett, Claire Blamey, Peter Christie, Mat Coward, Kate Eccles, Paul Farthing, George Featherston, Paul Gallagher, Alan Gardiner, Keith George, Anne Hardwick, Richard Lowke, Diana Lyons, Dave Malin, Nick Maloret, Tom Ruffles, Meryl Santis, Paul Screeton, Gary Stocker, Roman Suchyj, Frank Thomas, Paul Thomas, Owen Whiteoak, Bobby Zodiac. **FRANCE** Michel Meurger. **GERMANY** Ulrich Magin. **IRELAND** Andy Conlon, Pat Corcoran. **ISRAEL** Zvi Ron. **NEW ZEALAND** Peter Hassall.

**SCOTLAND** Roger Musson. **SWEDEN** Sven Rosén. **THAILAND** Terry W Colvin.

**USA** Loren Coleman (ME), Jim Conlan (CT), Myron Hoyt (ME), Greg May (FL), Jim Riecken (NY), Joseph Trainor (MA), Jeffrey Vallance (CA).

## FORT SORTERS

Regular Fort Sorts are currently on hiatus – but please continue to send in your clippings to *Fortean Times*, PO Box 1200, Whitstable, CT1 9RH.

## CLIPPING CREDITS FOR FT434

Daina Almario-Kopp, Gerard Apps, David Barrett, James Beckett, Peter Brookesmith, Peter Christie, Terry Colvin, Andy Conlon, Pat Corcoran, John Evans, George Featherston, Alan Gardiner, Paul Gaughan, Richard George, Jenifer Green, Anne Hardwick, Hugh Henry, Nigel Herwin, Tony James, Rosalind Johnson, Chris Josiffe, Andy Lapham, Robin Lee, Wendy Lockwood, Dave Malin, Nick Maloret, Alan Mansfield, Loma Stroup Nilsson, Tom Ruffles, Paul Screeton, Gil Sprow, Gary Stocker, Brett Taylor, Chris Tye, Carole Tyrrell, Clive Watson, Len Watson, Owen Whiteoak, Paul Whyte, Janet Wilson, James Wright.

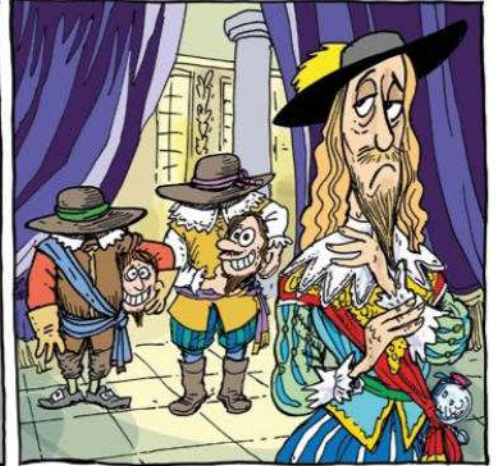


# PHENOMENOMIX

LADIES WHO LURCH

HUNT EMERSON and ROB GANDY

FOR CENTURIES KINGS HAVE BEEN APED BY THEIR COURTIER'S IN BOTH MANNERS AND DRESS...



AND OF COURSE THE WAY QUEENS AND PRINCESSES DRESS HAS INFLUENCED FEMALE FASHION DOWN THE YEARS...



EDWARD VII'S QUEEN ALEXANDRA WORE CHOKERS AND HIGH NECKLINES TO HIDE A SMALL SCAR ON HER NECK...



...AND STARTED THE FASHION TREND OF THE NEXT 50 YEARS!



ALEXANDRA'S MOST RADICAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE WORLD OF CHIC WAS THE RESULT OF HER LIMP! RHEUMATIC FEVER IN CHILDHOOD HAD LEFT HER WITH A STIFF LEG...



THE "ALEXANDRA LIMP" WAS WIDELY IMITATED!



THE FASHION CROSSED THE ATLANTIC TO HOLLYWOOD ROYALTY!

MARILYN MONROE WOULD SHAVE A QUARTER INCH OFF ONE STILETTO HEEL TO GIVE HER "THAT SWAY"!





# COMING NEXT MONTH



## GRANDMOTHER OF WICCA

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF  
MARGARET MURRAY



## REVENGE OF THE SHAMAN

THE STRANGE AFFAIR OF THE  
TWO-HEADED AMULET



INCORRUPTIBLES.  
ROBOT POLITICIANS.  
FACES IN PLACES  
AND MUCH MORE...

FORTEAN TIMES 435  
ON SALE 10 AUG 2023

# STRANGE DEATHS

## UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

Police in Banjarnegara in central Java, Indonesia, arrested self-proclaimed shaman Slamet Tohari, 45, after the son of a man who had visited him for a financial multiplication ritual told them his father had not been seen since visiting Tohari's house. On investigation, authorities found 12 bodies buried on Tohari's property, all aged between 25 and 50 and buried in the last six months, none showing any signs of violence. Two or three victims were buried together in a single grave, along with a mineral water bottle. Tohari, who had been imprisoned in 2019 for forgery, had set himself up as a shaman after leaving prison, modelling himself on the famous money multiplication shaman Mbah Slamet (Grandpa Slamet), who claims to be able to multiply 70m rupiah (£3,755) into 5b rupiah (£271k). However, after taking money from clients for a series of rituals, instead of multiplying their cash, he invited them for a final ritual during which he gave a sedative and fatal doses of cyanide and buried their bodies on his plantation. Money multiplication scams are popular in Indonesia, with many advertised on social media, but Tohari is likely to face the death penalty for his. *BBC News, 6 Apr 2023.*

Fourteen churchgoers died in a flash flood on the Jukskei River in Johannesburg, South Africa, while carrying out baptisms and other rituals in the river waters. A priest and 33 worshippers had gathered on the riverbank when the sudden surge of water, caused by storms further upstream, struck, sweeping many of the congregation away. Victor Ncube, one of the group, said that he managed to pull five people out of the water, but others had been carried too far downstream for him to reach them. Emergency services spokesman Robert Mulaudzi said that storm surges were common on the Jukskei and advised churches to "exercise caution as to where and when they conduct these rituals". *Metro, 6 Dec 2022.*

The watchman at a children's holiday camp near Omsk in Siberia, Russia, died after being bitten and trampled by a camel kept at the camp. The watchman, aged 51, apparently punched the camel in the face and, according to a local report, "the animal did not appreciate such treatment" and bit him several

times, then trampled him. He was taken to a local hospital but could not be saved. In Panchu village, in Rajasthan, India, Sohanram Nayak tried to recapture one of his camels after it broke free from its rope restraints and chased off after another camel. When he caught up with it, the camel grabbed Nayak by the neck, threw him to the ground and "chewed off his head". Following Nayak's decapitation, six people armed with sticks, allegedly members of Nayak's family, bludgeoned the camel to death. Camels are notoriously short-tempered and surprisingly strong; they can generate a bite force of 28kg/cm<sup>2</sup> (398psi), which can cause severe damage to the human body. *dailymail.co.uk, 23 Jan, 8 Feb 2023.*

A 37-year-old Dutch tourist from Eindhoven was killed by an exploding pétanque ball during a party in Stavelot, Belgium. Several of the balls, which are metal and used in a street version of bowls popular in France and Belgium, had been placed around a firepit by the man and his friends, and one of them got so hot that it exploded. "It had the same effect as a grenade. When the ball exploded, pieces flew into the back of someone's skull," said a spokesperson for Stavelot-Malmedy police. The victim, who also suffered severe facial burns, was rushed to hospital in Liège, where he was placed in a medically induced coma, but he died five days later. Surprisingly, this is not the first fatality from a pétanque ball explosion. In 2018, a French man died when a ball left beside a barbecue exploded. *express.co.uk, 24 May 2023.*

In Indiana, it was an actual grenade that caused problems for a man in Lakes of the Four Seasons. Along with his teenage son and daughter, he was looking through their grandfather's belongings when they came across a grenade and, as Sheriff Oscar Martinez Jr. said in a statement: "Someone reportedly pulled the pin on the device and it detonated." Emergency services said they found "an adult male unresponsive at the scene" who was later declared dead, and they took the teenagers to hospital with shrapnel wounds. Authorities later issued a statement saying that anyone who finds a grenade or other explosive ordnance should move away from the device and call 911 immediately. *npr.org, 21 May 2023.*





# RECORD COLLECTOR PRESENTS METALLICA

**JOE BERLINGER**  
HOW SOME KIND OF  
MONSTER SAVED HIM  
— AND THE BAND

**EXCLUSIVE**  
CLIFF BURTON'S  
LAST UK  
INTERVIEW

**M72 LIVE SH\*T!**  
SIMONE FROM  
EPICA REPORTS!

## MEN FOR ALL SEASONS

THE COLLECTORS! THE ALBUMS REAPPRAISED!  
PLUS: SELECT UK DISCOGRAPHY

LANG LANG: "I FELT FLAMES AND THOUGHT, 'OH MY GOD!'" EYE WITNESS: SAN FRAN 1982  
FLEMMING RASMUSSEN: PUPPETS, POKER AND BREAKFAST BUFFETS THE STORY BEHIND  
THE BLACK ALBUM ART BRIAN SLAGEL SWINGS THE BLADE THE ROCK & ROLL HALL OF FAME  
METALLICA BOOK AND MOVIE CLUBS + INSIDE THE ALL WITHIN MY HANDS FOUNDATION

£8.95



OUT NOW!

THE ALBUMS, THE HISTORY AND THE MILESTONES OF THE BIGGEST  
METAL BAND ON EARTH... AND NOTHING ELSE MATTERS.

on sale now, or available to order from here:  
[shop.recordcollectormag.com/rcmetallicaf](http://shop.recordcollectormag.com/rcmetallicaf)




**\$6.66**  
PER ISSUE



A  
**MONSTER**  
APP

**THE WORLD'S #1 HORROR MAGAZINE**  
IS NOW AVAILABLE PRIOR TO NEWSSTANDS ON **iPHONE** AND **ANDROID**.

VISIT [RUE-MORGUE.COM](http://RUE-MORGUE.COM) ON THE  **APP STORE**

FOLLOW US ON **INSTAGRAM**, **TWITTER** AND **FACEBOOK** 